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D I S S E R T A T I O N

O N

The Conduct of the Jewish Sanhedrim,

A N D

The Advice offered by Gamaliel,

In the famous trial of the Apostles,
Acts v. 17. — 41.



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The Conduct of the Jewish Sanhedrim,
A N D
The Advice offered by Gamaliel,
In the famous trial of the Apostles,
Acts v. 17.—41.
Considered as an argument for the truth
of CHRISTIANITY.

Μή τις εκ των Ἀρχόντων ἐπίστευσεν εἰς αὐτόν, ἢ εκ των
Φαρισαίων; Joan. cap. vii. 48.

Εκ των Ἀρχόντων πολλοὶ ἐπίστευσαν εἰς αὐτόν. ἀλλὰ διὰ τῆς
Φαρισαϊότης ἐκ ὁμολόγησεν, ἵνα μὴ ἀποσυνάγωγι γυνανταί.
Joan. cap. xii. 42.

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MDCCLXIX.



JOHN

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TO THE HONOURABLE,
JOHN CAMPBELL OF CALDER, Esq;

THE FOLLOWING DISSERTATION

IS,

WITH THE HIGHEST RESPECT AND ESTEEM,

INSCRIBED BY

HIS MUCH OBLIGED,

MOST HUMBLE, AND

MOST OBEDIENT SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N.

WHOWER is in the least acquainted with the history of Christianity must know, that, ever since the first publication of it to the world, there has been a most powerful combination against it.

Men, not only of different nations, but also of different principles, and from views too the most opposite, have endeavoured its destruction like that of a common enemy. No method of attack has been omitted, that but *seemed* to promise success. But it has hitherto maintained its ground, and defied all the arts of learning and policy, all the influence and tyranny of power, jointly employed, either to suppress or expose it.

The various manner in which the attack upon it has been managed, has happily obliged its friends to diversify

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their method of defence, and furnished opportunities, which they might not have otherwise had, of becoming better acquainted with its worth and excellence themselves, and of endeavouring to convince others of it likewise.

Thus the objections thrown out against Christianity, by those who have espoused the cause of *infidelity* and *scepticism*, have set its friends upon a critical examination of it; and from thence have arisen some of the most beautiful illustrations, and the most learned and judicious defences of it; defences which might, if not convince, at least put *infidelity* itself to the blush, if but read with attention, and judged of with candour.

Thus the *divine wisdom*, to which it owes its origin, ever watchful over its interests, brings *meat out of the eater, and sweetness out of the strong*.

To add to the many defences of Christianity which have already appeared, may by some be thought *superfluous*, and by others *imprudent*, as if every new attempt

tempt of this kind carried in it a tacit imputation of defect and weakness in the former.

It would be ungrateful, yea unjust, to those who have stood up as advocates for Christianity, not to own that many of them have pleaded its cause with all the energy and perspicuity of argument, and of consequence with honour to themselves, and advantage to it.

But as it can be no reflection upon them, that they have not considered its evidence in every point of light; and as the evidence for Christianity, which is of the probable kind, must, from the very nature of it, admit of a great variety of degrees, and receive a new accession of strength from the illustration of every circumstance which carries in it a presumption of the truth of it, I beg leave to take notice of one, which I do not remember to have seen insisted upon by others, or, if touched by any, pursued so as to illustrate its force and beauty.

And though the argument deduced

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from

from it does not of itself, or abstractly considered, afford a full proof of the truth of Christianity, (as indeed no argument of this kind can do); yet, if it is found to be just, it is not to be rejected. Added to the other proofs, of the direct and collateral kind, it will increase their strength, and have an effect similar to what is produced by that part of an edifice, which, when viewed by itself, may seem inconsiderable, but taken in connection with the other parts, will appear not only to have a propriety in it, but also to display the beauty and propriety of the rest.

Considered in this light, the collateral and presumptive evidence that has been exhibited in *the observations upon the conversion of the apostle Paul*,—*upon the conduct and character of Judas Iscariot*,—in some of *Mr Duchal's sermons*,—and *Dr Gerard's late dissertations*, may be, and is, of considerable service to the cause of Christianity.

Of the same nature with these (however short of them in the execution) is
that

that argument which I propose to illustrate in the following essay.

The historical passage from which the argument is suggested, is recorded *Acts* v. 17.—41.; and contains the narrative of a very famous trial. The case stands shortly thus.

“ The apostles of our Lord having,
 “ in support of the commission, and by
 “ virtue of powers they had received
 “ from him, wrought many incontest-
 “ able miracles, and thereby greatly ad-
 “ vanced the honour of their master,
 “ and their own character, among those
 “ who were the witnesses of them, the
 “ *Pharisees* and *Sadducees* take offence at
 “ their success, and, though of senti-
 “ ments the most widely different, unite
 “ to run them down, and thereby ruin
 “ the cause they had espoused. For this
 “ purpose, they had interest enough
 “ with those in power to get them com-
 “ mitted to the common jail, as the most
 “ effectual means of silencing them in
 “ the mean time, and of securing them
 “ till they should be afterwards brought
 “ to

“ to a trial. But an angel appeared to
 “ them by night, and set them at li-
 “ berty. Next morning, impatient of
 “ any longer delay, and ignorant of
 “ what had happened, the high-priest
 “ summoned the council, and all the
 “ senate of the children of Israel; and
 “ having thus obtained a full house,
 “ they ordered the prisoners to be
 “ brought to the bar. Officers were
 “ dispatched for this purpose. They
 “ soon returned, and informed the
 “ court, that the prison-doors they
 “ found shut, and the guard placed
 “ upon them attending at their post;
 “ but that the apostles had made their
 “ escape. While deliberating what was
 “ proper to be done upon this emer-
 “ gence, they receive intelligence, that
 “ the apostles, fearless of danger, were
 “ teaching publicly in the temple. The
 “ judges, equally surpris'd at their e-
 “ scape, and provoked by their bold-
 “ ness, and growing reputation, are at
 “ a loss what to do. However, they
 “ send for the apostles; and they, with-
 “ out

“ out any compulsion, readily attend.
 “ And being asked the reason of the
 “ disobedience they had shewn to their
 “ orders, they boldly avow what they
 “ had done, and their resolution of
 “ supporting, at all hazards, the cause
 “ of Jesus; whose death they flatly
 “ charge the judges with, and whose
 “ resurrection they openly assert; plead-
 “ ing the superior obligations they were
 “ under to the divine authority, as an
 “ apology for their disobedience, and
 “ appealing to themselves for the rea-
 “ sonableness of such a conduct *.
 “ Exasperated to the highest degree
 “ with

* There is such a striking resemblance betwixt
 this part of the defence offered by the *Apostles* before
 the Sanhedrim, and that offered by *Socrates* when
 pleading his own cause before the Athenians, that it
 cannot escape the observation of any who have ever
 read both.

Socrates, who lived in one of the most degenerate
 periods of the Athenian commonwealth, was too
 good to escape the envy, censure, and opposition of
 some among that licentious people, who, because he
 attempted to correct the sentiments, and reform the
 practice, of his countrymen, with respect to religion,

“ with a defence which carried in it
 “ such a heavy and public accusation
 “ against them, they are for proceeding
 “ immediately to extremities against the
 “ apostles, as the only effectual way to
 “ prevent the spread of that hated reli-
 “ gion which they supported. At this
 “ critical juncture, *Gamaliel*, who, it
 “ would seem, had waited the issue of
 “ their deliberations, rose up, and,
 “ shocked

is accused of a design to corrupt both; who, be-
 cause he failed not to expose the *ignorance* of the
Sophists, who were the *tutors* of the *great*, and the
superstition of the *Poets*, who were the *instructors* of
 the *vulgar*, drew upon himself the resentment of
 both.

These, taking the advantage of their influence
 with their respective admirers, did all they could to
 ruin *Socrates*, whose knowledge and manners, and
 the weight these gave him with the best of the peo-
 ple, they considered as a bar to that greatness and
 power at which they aspired.

Since, therefore, they could no otherwise ruin him,
 a most false and calumnious accusation is trumped up
 against him by *Melitus*, and supported by *Lycon* and
Anytus, with all the force of their eloquence and in-
 fluence. — In the apologetic discourse which *Socra-*
tes made for himself upon this occasion, *Plato*, his
 scholar, introduces him, in one part of it, expressing
 himself

“ shocked with the violence of the
 “ measures they seemed resolved on,
 “ he, with a gravity becoming the im-
 “ portance of the occasion, — the cause
 “ in

himself to this purpose. Εἴ μοι πρὸς ταῦτα εἰποιτε, ὦ Σώκратες, νυν μὲν Ἀνυτῷ ὃ πεισομένης, ἀλλ' ἀφιεμένῃ σε, ἐπὶ ταῦτα μιν τοὶ ἐφ' ὧτε μηκέτι ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ ζητήσει διατρίβειν, μηδὲ φιλοσοφεῖν. εἰ δ' ἄλλως ἔτι τῷτο πράττων, ἀποδανῇ. Εἰ ἔν με (ὅπερ εἶπον) ἐπὶ ταύτοις ἀφίετε, εἰπομ' ἂν ὑμῖν, ὅτι ἐγὼ ὑμᾶς, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, ἀσπαζομαι μὲν καὶ φιλῶ, πεισομαι δ' ὅ τῷ Θεῷ μᾶλλον ἢ ὑμῖν. καὶ ὥσπερ ἂν ἐμπνέω, καὶ οἶστέ ὦ, ὃ μὴ παύσομαι φιλοσοφῶν, καὶ ὑμῖν παρακελευόμενος τε καὶ ἐνδείκνυμενος, ὅτῳ ἂν ἐντυγχάνω ὑμῶν, λέγων οἷα περ εἰώδα, &c. —

— Ταῦτα καὶ νεωτέρῳ καὶ πρεσβυτέρῳ, ὅτῳ ἂν ἐντυγχάνω, ποιῶ, καὶ ξένῳ καὶ ἰσθῷ, μᾶλλον δ' τοῖς ἄστοις, ὅσῳ μοι ἐγγυτέρῳ εἰς γενεὴν. ταῦτα γὰρ κελεύει ὁ Θεὸς ἐν ἱσθῇ. καὶ ἐγὼ οἶμαι οὐδὲν πᾶσι ὑμῖν μείζον ἀγαθὸν γενέσθαι ἐν τῇ πόλει, ἢ τὴν ἐμὴν τῷ Θεῷ ὑπηρεσίαν. — *i. e.* Should you, to the charge exhibited against me, reply, — *Socrates*, we pay no regard to what *Anytus* has advanced; we acquit you; but upon this express condition, that you are never again to be employed in this manner, nor to teach any more: if you do, you shall be put to death: Were you, as I said, to offer me a pardon upon these terms, my answer should be, — O Athenians, I highly esteem and regard you; but I will *rather obey God than you*: and as long as I live, and my strength remains, I will not cease to teach and instruct such of you as I shall have occasion to meet, in my usual way. This office I will perform to young and old, to countrymen and strangers; but, in a particular manner, to you my countrymen, with whom I am more nearly connected. For, be assured, this is the

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command

“ in dependence,—the dignity of his
 “ own character, yea,—and that of
 “ the court, which the other members,
 “ at least in the first transports of their
 “ passion, seem to have forgot, of-
 “ fered the following sage advice,
 “ ver. 35.—41. “ *Ye men of Israel,*

command of God; and I am persuaded, that you
 enjoy not a greater privilege in the state, than this
 service which I perform for God. *Plat. Apolog.*
Socrat.

This passage has often, and very justly, been ad-
 mired as one of the finest of antiquity. It breathes
 sentiments truly excellent,—a spirit of true *heroism*,
 in his noble contempt of death,—of *patriotism*, in
 his affection for his countrymen, and—of *piety*, in
 the sacred regard he shews for God. Now, let the
 character and situation of the apostles, at this jun-
 cture, be but duly attended to, and I dare appeal to
 the impartial world, whether *their* speech is not as
 animated, and their conduct as great and noble.
 This I take notice of, not at all to detract from the
 honour due to *Socrates*, (it would be base so much
 as to attempt it), but that those gentlemen who
 are accustomed to run down the apostles as a set of
 weak contemptible creatures, may consider how far
 they are deserving of such epithets, or it is consist-
 ent with candour to give them, when their conduct
 is so similar to that which they so justly admire in an-
 other.

“ *take*

“ take heed what ye intend to do, as touch-
 “ ing these men. For before these days
 “ rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be
 “ some body, to whom a number of men, a-
 “ bout 400, joined themselves : who was
 “ slain, and all, as many as obeyed him,
 “ were scattered, and brought to nought.
 “ After this man, rose up Judas of Galilee,
 “ in the days of the taxing, and drew a-
 “ way much people after him : He also pe-
 “ rished, and all, even as many as obeyed
 “ him, were dispersed. And now I say
 “ unto you, Refrain from these men, and
 “ let them alone : for if this counsel, or
 “ this work, be of men, it will come to
 “ nought : but if it be of God, ye cannot
 “ overthrow it ; lest haply ye be found to
 “ fight against God.” And it is added,
 “ To him they agreed : and when they had
 “ called the apostles, and beaten them, they
 “ commanded them, that they should not
 “ preach in the name of Jesus, and let them
 “ go.”

I hope it will be thought no objection
 to this narrative, or the argument that
 may be deduced from it, that the facts

contained in it are transmitted to us in the records of Christianity. Where else should we so naturally expect to find an account of them? Among the writings of the enemies of Christianity, it could not be looked for, if they thought it could in the least militate against them.

For a confirmation of the truth of the above-mentioned facts, let it suffice to observe, that (so far at least as I know) they have never been refused, much less disproved, by any of the Sanhedrim, or the Jews, though they could not be ignorant of what is alleged in the preceding narrative, as the history of the *Acts* is generally allowed to have been written about *A. D.* 63. *i. e.* about the close of Paul's two years imprisonment at Rome, with an account of which it concludes. And as little can it be imagined, that they wanted either inclination to deny, or power to disprove these facts, had not the account given of them been just. And should any of our modern *Infidels* take

take upon them, without adducing any proof, to deny the authenticity of it, might it not be sufficient to observe, that a proof can be brought in favour of this history, as strong as of any other of equal antiquity?

Taking, therefore, the history as admitted, our business is, to inquire of what service it can be made to the cause of Christianity.

For this purpose, I shall endeavour to make it appear, that hence there arises a collateral and subsidiary argument for Christianity, of considerable weight, because furnished from the conduct of those who cannot be suspected of any bias in its favour, but what was occasioned by the force of its evidence.

The argument is suggested from the part which the court in general, and *Gamaliel* in particular, bore in the remarkable trial of the apostles, mentioned in the above passage of history; from which it is proposed to shew, that both afford the strongest presumptions of
their

their conviction with respect to the truth of the resurrection of Jesus, upon which his religion rests as its basis. An argument this, which comes recommended, by the novelty and compendiousness of it, to some, who, if it wanted either, would not give themselves the trouble of considering it; and which, from the manner of its appearance in this essay, may perhaps excite the attention of others, who may be able to exhibit it to the public with greater advantage, from their improvements upon it; for which, I am sensible, there is still abundant scope.

Encouraged by these hopes, — the confidence he has in the candour of his readers, and — by the advice of some of his friends, (to whom he gratefully acknowledges his obligations for the judicious hints they have suggested), the author ventures it abroad; and will reckon himself happy if it shall be found to contain any thing of service to the cause of religion, and as such deserving
of

of a favourable reception from the public.

In the discussion of this argument, I shall, for the sake of that order which it may be proper to observe, divide this essay into two parts; the first of which shall have the conduct of the court; the second, the advice of *Gamaliel*, as it is supported by his character, and the argument he makes use of for the subject of it. The observations from both, in favour of Christianity, I shall reserve to the conclusion.

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P A R T I.

Observations on the conduct of the Sanhedrim, in the trial of the apostles, and an attempt to account for it, in consistence with their belief of the resurrection of Jesus, which it seems to discover.

A FAITHFUL record of the transactions of this venerable court, so far as concerns the subject of this essay, is now before us, and subjected to our review. The character of the prisoners at the bar,—the ground of their arraignment,—the importance of the cause in dependence,—the defence the prisoners make,—the part the judges act,—and
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the advice *Gamaliel* offers, claim our attention to this most solemn trial, and must interest us in the issue of it.

To pass over many remarks upon the conduct of this court, which I might make, did they fall within my present design, I beg leave to offer a few, which I hope the reader will find to be just, and properly authenticated. And,

In the first place, though the apostles had the day before been committed to strict ward; though the Sanhedrim * had been informed of their escape, and
very

* That the reader may the better judge of the regard due to the decisions of this court, it may not be improper to drop a few hints with respect to the institution, nature, jurisdiction, and authority of it. The Rabbinical, and some Christian writers, pretend to trace the institution of this court as far back as the time of Moses, — to found the erection of it upon the command of God to him, Numb. xi. 16. 17. — and alledge, that from that time it subsisted during all the intermediate periods of the Jewish state; till the reduction of the city and temple of Jerusalem by Titus, the Roman Emperor. But for this its so early origin, I humbly imagine the vouchers are not such as can be depended on. Its name, which is evidently of a Greek derivation, would
seem

very probably had received a hint of the manner of it too; yet, can it escape the observation of any? they never so much as interrogate them about it, or attempt

seem to indicate, that it is not of so great antiquity. And there are many reasons, of considerable weight, which would induce one to place it no higher than the government of the Asmonæan family, or the time of the Maccabees. But as to this the inquiry is not necessary to our present purpose.

It is of more consequence to observe, that, for a considerable time at least, it was the supreme court of judicature in the Jewish nation; — that, to render it the more respectable, and give its decisions the more weight, it was composed of 70 or 72 members, chosen out of the best families, both of the priests and laity, and distinguished for their knowledge, especially of the law, both written and traditional; — that the great council or senate had its seat at Jerusalem, and, before the conquest of Judea by the Romans, took cognisance of the most important affairs, relating both to church and state, the whole council sitting upon such occasions, and no less than twenty-three of the members upon any other, (*Lightf. Hor. Hib. et Talmud. in Joan. xviii. 15. p. 609*). But after Judea became a province of the Roman empire, though the Jews retained the undisturbed exercise of their religion, and had the liberty of holding their senate, council, or sanhedrim; yet as this council must have sitted by licence from the Roman govern-

attempt to prove a collusion with the keepers of the prison; which, had there been any such thing, it was most natural for them to have done: for they could not
be

ors, it is not easy to determine precisely what powers it still remained possessed of.

The learned have taken different sides upon this question, and offered many plausible things in support of their respective opinions.

Dr Lightfoot seems to allow, that for forty years before the destruction of the temple, the Sanhedrim had lost the power of judging in capital causes; but alledges it was not taken from them by the Romans, but lost, *non utendo*, by their own supine negligence, or unreasonable lenity. (Lightf. Hor. Hib. et Talmud. v. 2. p. 248. 611.)

But Mr Lardner thinks, (and indeed he says a great deal for his opinion), that, after the reduction of the Jews by the Romans, the Sanhedrim had no power left with it of final judgement in capital causes. He allows they had the privilege of summoning witnesses, taking examinations, inflicting lesser punishments, such as, imprisonment and flagellation; but contends, the sentence of death could not be passed by any but the Roman Governor; (*Vide* Lardn. Credibil. &c. v. 1. p. 70. — 217). — Of the same opinion is Bishop Pearson, in his treatise on the Creed, p. 195. 196. — Others there are who hold an opinion, which is, as it were, a mean betwixt the two former; and alledge, that as the Romans seldom concerned themselves in matters that
purely

be ignorant of the advantage the apostles would take from their declining such inquiry, to gain credit to the account they themselves gave of the matter, and thereby strengthen their cause.

On the contrary, conscious, it would seem, of the truth of the miracle, in the deliverance of the apostles from prison, the Sanhedrim never so much as dispute, much less attempt to disprove it: yea, they artfully avoid all inquiry about their escape, lest they might have

purely related to the religion of the countries which they conquered, they allowed the Jews to examine, at the bar of the Sanhedrim, all matters relating to religion, and particularly heresy, the claims of the prophets, &c. (Lightf. Hor. Hib. et Talmud. in Act. ix. 2. p. 681.), and to condemn for crimes which the Jewish law made capital; but that the ratification of such sentence by the Roman Governor was necessary to authorise the execution of it. If to the above account it is added, that at this time (the most degenerate period of the Jewish state) the Sanhedrim was mainly composed of *Pharisees* and *Sadducees*, the first *bigots*, the last *libertines*, in religion, their treatment of Christianity will say nothing *against* it, but the remorse they betray, a great deal *for* it.

thereby

thereby provoked them to divulge the manner of it.

Thus, from their silence concerning it in their present circumstances, the presumption is, that the members of the Sanhedrim believed the truth of it, or dreaded the issue of an inquiry into it. Yea,

Not only do they make no objection to the authenticity of the miracle wrought in behalf of the apostles, but as little do they make any to those said to have been performed by the apostles themselves. So far are they from denying them, that they expressly acknowledge them (Acts iv. 15. 16.), and become witnesses to the truth of them; which we may believe they would never have done, could they possibly have adduced any thing to invalidate or expose them; as this would have been, not only the most rational, but also the shortest and most successful, method of ruining the interest of the apostles, and advancing their own. But,

Though they do not deny, yea tho' they

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they acknowledge, that a notable miracle had been done by the apostles, because *manifest to all that dwelt in Jerusalem*, they go another way to work, to destroy the force of the argument drawn from it, since they had not honesty enough to own it.

They take the advantage of the weakness and credulity of a superstitious people, and endeavour to make them subservient to their political views. They attempt to persuade them, that the miracles wrought by the apostles, instead of being the effect of a divine agency, were produced by the aid of amulets or spells,—by virtue of the tetragrammaton, or ineffable name of God, which they alledged Christ had stole out of the temple, or—by the power of magic: pretences these, however absurd, the best their *prejudice* or *invention* could furnish them with, to support their own declining credit, and weaken, if they could not destroy, that of the apostles, which they saw daily increasing.

Such

Such was the notoriety of the miracles wrought by our Lord and his apostles, that they saw there was not the least room left for cavil about the truth of them; and therefore they were obliged, either to acknowledge them as the effect of a divine power, or to account for them in some other way. And in the solution they give of the matter, it is difficult to say, whether they discover greater *weakness* of judgment, or *badness* of heart, in admitting the miracles wrought by their own prophets as a confirmation of their mission from God; and yet rejecting those wrought by our Lord, and his apostles, without so much as offering a proof of their being wrought by a different power.

This objection, if it has any force in it against the latter, must also conclude against the former, and with one stroke destroy all regard to their own religion, as well as that of Jesus. But no matter: in their present humour, even *that*
must

must fall, rather than that *this* should stand.

Do not all these mean shifts, these little artifices, however cunningly varnished over, betray not only the most obstinate prejudice, and inveterate malice, but also a strong presumption of their conviction, both of the reality of the miracles, and of a divine agency in the performance of them; and thus, not only leave the Christian in possession of all the advantage he can derive from this argument, but add to the force of it, by the weakness of their attempt to wrest it from him? But this I only observe by the by.

What I think of most consequence to observe, upon the conduct of the Sanhedrim in this famous trial of the apostles, is, that though the chief ground of their arraignment was the public testimony they gave to the resurrection of Jesus, as a fact upon which they rested (as he himself had done before) the truth of his character and religion; though, I say, this public testimony, and

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the

the miracles they wrought in support of it, were the chief grounds of their impeachment and trial; yet, is it not surprising, none of the judges so much as insinuate any thing, either against the one or the other?

Whence all this silence? Was this acting like men who believed the resurrection of our Lord, and the miracles of his apostles, to be all fiction and imposture?

They were too sagacious not to have seen, that if they could have adduced a proof of fraud in either, they would, all at once, have exposed *them* and their *cause*, yea ruined *both*. Why then did they not attempt it? It could not be alledged by the Sanhedrim, that the story of the resurrection had so lately taken air, that they had not time to prepare a confutation of it. Had this been the case, it would have justly subjected the account which the apostles gave of it to suspicion, and been a sufficient apology for the Sanhedrim's declining a thorough examination of it, at least at that

that time. But the reverse was the matter of fact. How soon the apostles were themselves satisfied of the truth of the resurrection, it was publicly announced to the world, and still boldly adhered to, not only in the first fallies of passion, when it might be alledged their pride would not allow them to recant, but also in their most sober moments, several years after, when the Sanhedrim had sufficient time for a deliberate inquiry into the truth of it;—yea, adhered to in the immediate view of the greatest danger for their public avowal of it. Why then, I say, did not the Sanhedrim attempt a confutation of their account of it? It could only be, because they saw they must fail of success, or were themselves convinced of what their *pride* would not allow them confess to be *true*, and their *interest* made them endeavour to persuade the world was *false*.

They were sharp-sighted enough to observe, that, in proportion as the account of the resurrection given by the

apostles gained credit, their interest with the people must decline. It was necessary, therefore, to dress up some plausible tale, that might in the mean time amuse them. Accordingly they published to the world, that the disciples had stole away the body of their Lord from the sepulchre, while the guard placed upon it was asleep; and, to gain the greater credit to this account, they prevailed upon the soldiers to publish it as the genuine account of the matter.

This story they trumped up, on the first notice of the resurrection, before any other account of it could have time to fly abroad; and silly as this expedient was, could they have supported it with proper evidence, it had been decisive as to the charge of imposture which they attempted to fix upon the apostles.

But, is it not too remarkable to escape the notice of any? they never so much as offered a proof in support of the account they themselves gave, or against that given by the apostles, notwithstanding.

standing the matter in dispute was of the last importance, — the whole nation was interested in the issue of it, and — many had already declared in favour of the resurrection.

The Sanhedrim had at this time an additional incitement to have set them upon the most minute scrutiny of the account given of the resurrection of Jesus by his apostles. They had not only asserted their own account of the matter to be *true*, but that given by the Sanhedrim to be *false*; charging them expressly with having invented the story of the *stealth*, and bribed the soldiers to acknowledge and propagate it as their own.

This charge of *falsehood* and *bribery*, so openly brought against them, carried in it such an imputation upon their honour, as made a vindication necessary, had it been practicable. What less could wipe off the stain thrown upon their character, or justify the severe measures they were taking against the apostles? Would you not expect, that,
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whatever they might have done before, now their character was so directly struck at, they would endeavour to support it?—That, for this purpose, had they believed the story told by the soldiers to be *true*, they would have immediately apprehended them, adduced a proof of the fact, lodged a complaint with the Roman Governor against them, and had them punished for their neglect, treachery, and contempt of orders?—Or, if it might be thought imprudent in the Sanhedrim to take such proof, or enter such complaint against the soldiers to their officers, lest resentment might have made them retract their first account of the matter, and add the weight of their authority to the testimony of the apostles; yet why did they not make the proper inquiry after those they considered as *principals* in the fraud? Why did they not promise an indemnity and reward to any of the accomplices for a discovery? Had they not already a proof of the powerful influence of money upon one
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of their number against his very master? why did they not try what success the offer of it might have with some of their number against his comrades? Or, when the apostles soon after appeared in the temple, and publicly preached the resurrection of their Lord, why did not the Sanhedrim question them upon this subject? Had either of these things been done, their story would have carried some air of plausibility in it. How surprising that none of them should so much as ever be attempted? Whence could a conduct so strange proceed, but from a consciousness that an attempt to *clear* would have only served to *blacken* their character still more? that nothing was to be got by a strict examination into the matter, but more disgrace to themselves? that their endeavours to *refute* would have only tended to *confirm* the account which the apostles gave of the resurrection of their Lord and Master? and therefore that the best way was, to let the story die away, by asking no more questions about it? Accordingly,
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having called the apostles, and ordered them to be flogged in their presence, they dismissed them, with the strongest injunctions not to speak any more in the name of Jesus, if they would not incur a punishment yet more severe.

Thus the Sanhedrim endeavoured to hush up matters at home, while in the mean time they sent such an account of the resurrection abroad, as might best serve their own purpose.

In the account transmitted to the several synagogues *, they charged the apostles with the stealth of their master's body, but very wisely left out the glaring absurdity in the first edition of this story, viz. *That though the body was*

* Just. Mart. Dial. cum Tryph. — Ἄνδρες χειροτονήσαντες ἐκλεκτοὺς, εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην ἐπέμψετε, κηρύσσαντες, ὅτι οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ, κλεψάντες αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ μνηματος νυκτός, ἀποδὲν κατέτεθον, ἀρπάζοντες ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος, πλανῶσι τὴν ἀνθρώπου, λέγοντες, ἐγχερῆσθαι αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν, καὶ εἰς οὐρανὸν ἀνελλυθῆναι. i. e. Having pitched upon proper persons, they sent them abroad through the world, to publish, that his disciples, having stolen him (his body) in the night-time out of the tomb or sepulchre where they had laid it, after they had taken it down from the cross, imposed on the world, giving out that he was risen from the dead, and had returned to heaven.

carried away by the disciples while the guard was asleep, yet they were obliged to them for this piece of intelligence.

Even this account, though better framed than the first, is far from being unexceptionable; yea, it is submitted, if it does not carry such an air of improbability in it, as is enough, without any thing else, to create a suspicion of forgery.

But while the abject meanness of the Sanhedrim, in putting up with such affronts from the *apostles*, and the little evasive arts they used to save their reputation with the *people*, betray a conscious guilt; do not the boldness and intrepidity of the apostles, in circumstances the most dangerous, bespeak their integrity in the account they give of the matter, and plainly shew, that they were not afraid of having it examined and canvassed to the bottom? nay, would not one be apt to think there was nothing they more ardently wished? For surely, had they not been themselves fully satisfied of the truth

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of the resurrection, and prepared to support the account they gave of it with proper evidence, they would never have been so mad as to provoke the rulers to expose them by a detection, when they must have known, that the Sanhedrim had the inclination, and did not want the means necessary for this purpose.

To all this allow me to add another observation upon the conduct of the court in this matter.

At first, upon the charge of murder brought against them by the apostles, they were all in a transport of rage and fury ; and, however unbecoming the dignity of their character, could not conceal it. They resolved instantly upon their death, as a sacrifice to their provoked resentment.

But after *Gamaliel* had spoke, it is observed, *To him they agreed ; and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.* Whence all this sudden alteration
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of conduct? Does it not seem to indicate a suspicion (to say no more) that the cause the apostles supported, might be the cause of God? Which, by the by, they could never so much as have imagined, but upon the supposition of the reality of the resurrection, or at least their belief of it: for had they believed the story told by the apostles concerning it to be all a forgery, it is impossible they could have entertained the least doubt about the nature of the cause they were engaged in; and therefore, in place of altering, they would naturally have pursued the same measures they first resolved on against them.

The only difficulty in this hypothesis is, to reconcile the part the Sanhedrim acted with the belief or conviction we here ascribe to them, or at least suspect they had. Several causes might concur to the production of this effect.

Upon the supposition, (which is far from being an improbable one), that the evidence they had before them for the resurrection of Jesus, had produced

in them, if not a full conviction, yet a secret apprehension of the truth of it, I readily acknowledge their conduct was the reverse of what it *ought* to have been; but at the same time such as may, in a great measure, be accounted for, from the well-known effects of prejudice and passion; and therefore is quite agreeable to what, all circumstances considered, might have been looked for.

No doubt such conviction should have led them to a frank acknowledgement of it; but is it a thing so strange for men to act contrary to the convictions of their own minds, that it cannot be admitted in the case before us? No. The instances of such conduct, however unreasonable and criminal it may be, are, I am afraid, more frequent than is commonly attended to.

Did men always set out in the search of truth, from an honest and sincere regard to it, no doubt all their inquiries after it would be conducted with candour; and an open and avowed acknowledgement

ledgement of it would be the consequence of its discovery. But who does not know the unhappy effects of prejudice, and an attachment to opinions early imbibed, and confirmed, not only by long habit, but the authority also which they receive from their general prevalence? And though the glare of truth may sometimes pierce through the thick fogs of prejudice which interpose betwixt it and the understanding, and by the force of its evidence produce conviction; yet it cannot always gain an ingenuous acknowledgement of it. *Pride* often starts up, and prevents it, by representing such a concession as a reflection upon their *understanding*; and it is well known, that men under the influence of this passion can bear such an imputation with less temper than they would do an imputation upon their *virtue*. And hence very often they obstinately reject the *truth*, rather than submit to what they think the intolerable shame of confessing their former *error*.

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If the justness of these observations is admitted, will they not, in a great measure, account for the conduct of the Jewish rulers in the case under consideration? For surely it cannot be denied by any who are in the least acquainted with their character, that *prejudice* and *pride* were two main ingredients in the composition of it.

But though these causes might operate very strongly to the production of this effect, yet I doubt not but others may have contributed not a little to it likewise.

It is well enough known that the *Priests*, *Scribes*, and *Pharisees*, who were the ringleaders in the prosecution of Jesus and his apostles, had a strong attachment to the Mosaic institutions, not only on account of that splendour with which many of them were attended, but also on account of that power and influence they had established among the people, by their zealous observance of them. And were not these motives sufficient to make men of bad hearts
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(and such the most of them evidently were) oppose the introduction of a more spiritual and refined religion, which, how soon it took place, would, besides the other consequences of it, expose them to the contempt, if not resentment, of the people, for the active hand they had in cutting off its founder? Under the influence of such prejudices, the part they acted, though most base, is not to be wondered at: for what will not men, under the dominion of such passions, venture upon, rather than be disappointed in the gratification of them?

Tantum Religio potuit suadere malorum?

LUCRET. lib. I.

It may perhaps be said, "That tho'
 " the motives and causes above men-
 " tioned may, in ordinary cases, some-
 " times lead men to act inconsist-
 " ently with their own convictions;
 " yet, in the present case, this cannot
 " be admitted; because that horror and
 " anguish

“ anguish of mind which never fail to
 “ accompany the conviction of atrocious crimes, must have overbalanced every other consideration: so
 “ that, under the influence of such
 “ convictions, it is quite unnatural to
 “ suppose the Sanhedrim would have
 “ continued their severity to the apostles.”

It is readily allowed, that a quick sense of guilt would naturally occasion remorse, and very uneasy reflections; yet it will by no means follow, that a sense of guilt, even of the blackest and most aggravated kind, will always produce repentance and reformation, and prove, for the future, an effectual and uniform restraint from actions equally base. The contrary is evident from matter of fact: yea, it is no uncommon thing to see it operate in a manner similar to this, in which the Sanhedrim acted in the case under consideration.

It is highly probable, that as soon as they became sensible of their guilt in cutting off our Lord, their minds were filled

filled with the most painful reflections, and foreboding apprehensions of punishment.

The only way in which they could propose to themselves any enjoyment of the present, was by industriously avoiding to reflect on what was past; and therefore no wonder they should consider the apostles as the enemies of their peace, when, by any means, they brought their crucified Lord to their remembrance, and thus awakened those keen reproaches of their own minds, which, by a thousand shifts, they had endeavoured to lull asleep. In such an unhappy situation of mind, almost every incident was enough to put them out of humour, both with themselves and all around them.

At some such paroxysm of distress as this, it seems to have been, that the Sanhedrim meditated the destruction of the apostles: for from the history it appears, that the resolution against them took its rise more from resentment on account of the heavy charge which they brought

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against the Sanhedrim, than from any thing in their behaviour rude and disrespectful : And, therefore, though the bad usage they gave the apostles may be admitted as an evidence of the badness of their hearts, yet it does not conclude against the conviction we suppose them to be under, with respect to the resurrection of Jesus, and the cause with which it was connected.

As little does the concession, which, we have already observed, they made in favour of the apostles, upon the counsel or advice of *Gamaliel*. It is true this concession may, in appearance, and at first sight, seem inconsistent with the preceding observation ; in which we suppose the death of the apostles resolved on by the Sanhedrim in order to rid themselves of all future uneasiness from them ; but, upon mature consideration, will be found perfectly reconcilable with it. For though, under the immediate sense of pain, a guilty mind sometimes resolves upon the most desperate courses for the removal of it ; yet,
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at other times, and in a more tender mood, it is less violent, and seems to receive some impressions from argument and reflection, though, from a variety of causes, they may be hindered from producing their full effect.

Upon the whole, after the most impartial review of the part the Sanhedrim acted in this famous and important trial, I cannot help thinking, that while they discover the greatest virulence in the opposition they give to the cause of Christianity, their conduct at the same time betrays a secret conviction of the truth of that capital article of it, the resurrection of Jesus, notwithstanding all the art and policy with which they endeavour to varnish it over, and conceal it: and yet such conviction they could never be suspected of, all things considered, if the evidence for the resurrection had not been next to irresistible. Thus,

Fas est et ab hoste doceri.

Ovid. Metam. lib. 4.

Passing over the conduct of the Sanhedrim, with these few remarks upon it, I proceed to

P A R T

P A R T II.

Of Gamaliel's conduct in the famous Council, or Sanhedrim, of the Jews, assembled for the trial of the Apostles.

WHEN I first undertook the illustration of the historical passage already referred to, and of the argument in favour of Christianity to be deduced from it, what I proposed was no more than a particular consideration of the part *Gamaliel* acted at this trial of the apostles, — the advice he offered to this august assembly of the Jews, — and the regard due to it from his *character*, and the *argument* with which he supported it. But when I set about the execution of my design, I found myself insensibly led, by a train of thought, into the few passing observations upon the conduct of the Sanhedrim

drim in general, with which I have presented the reader in the first part ; and I hope they will appear to be just, and connected with the original design of the essay, to which I now address myself in the following sections.

S E C T I O N I.

Of the advice offered by Gamaliel, and an examination of the several principles upon which it may be supposed to have been given.

THE advice which *Gamaliel* offered to the Sanhedrim, while deliberating what ought to be done with the apostles, was as follows. “ *Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do as touching these men. I say unto you, refrain from them, and let them alone, lest haply ye be found to fight even against God.*” What more he observes to them upon this occasion, is by way of
of

of illustration and support of the advice he gives, and will fall under our consideration afterwards.

To judge of the import of this advice, it will be necessary to reflect upon the charge brought against the apostles, and the ground of it. It was not for any thing they had done in a private character or capacity, that such severe measures were resolved on by the Sanhedrim against them. No. But for their preaching the Messiahship and resurrection of their crucified Lord, and charging the Jews, and particularly their rulers, with his murder. Hence it is evident, that the cause of Christianity (not the conduct of the apostles, abstracted from it) was, though it is not expressly said so, the great subject of their present deliberation, and what *Gamaliel* referred to in these phrases, "*This counsel,*" and "*This work.*" This is so evident, that there is no need of adducing a proof of it: but his opinion with respect to it is not at first so obvious.

I acknowledge, the manner in which he expresses himself, carries somewhat of obscurity in it ; but, I humbly imagine, an impartial consideration of the words themselves, and of the circumstances under which they were spoken, may enable us to develop his meaning in them.

When an author does not see proper to deliver his opinion in terms so express as to prevent all ambiguity, the fairest method of arriving at his meaning seems to be, a candid examination of the several principles which, in his *then* situation and circumstances, may be most naturally supposed to have had the greatest influence upon him, and to follow that on whose side there is the highest degree of probability, which does best account for his conduct, and make it appear most consistent with itself, unless there be evident reasons for the contrary.

Those who have occasionally touched, or designedly commented, upon this remarkable passage of history, have run
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into a diversity of sentiments concerning *Gamaliel's* design, and the principles upon which he acted in this affair, according to the different views they have taken of it.

Most seem to think, that he aimed at no more than the release of the apostles ; but as to the principle upon which he advised this, they have entertained very different opinions : some alledging, that he advised it from the considerations of mere *prudence* ;— others, from an *attachment* to a *party* ;— or from a principle of *moderation* ;— or from an opinion that the apostles might be secretly pursuing the same plan with those who had before espoused the side of *liberty* ;— or from a downright *uncertainty* with respect to the merits of the cause for which they were tried. But I cannot help thinking, that something more was intended by *Gamaliel* than the mere release of the prisoners ; that he meant to serve the cause of Christianity ; and that in this he acted

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from the favourable opinion he entertained of it as the cause of God.

The several opinions deserve a minute and candid discussion; and thus weighed in the balance of impartial reason, their respective weight may be determined, and we may discern to which side the scale inclines. And if, in the issue of such investigation, the highest degree of probability shall appear on the side of that interpretation which supposes his favourable opinion of Christianity, his opinion must, in proportion to these degrees of probability, produce a conviction of the truth of it; because, as I shall endeavour to shew afterwards, it was not rashly formed, or without the proper means and opportunities of obtaining all that information which was necessary to enable him to give a mature judgement in the matter.

As I have ventured to differ from writers of considerable note, and to entertain a singular opinion upon this subject, the reader has a title to be informed of the reasons that have inclined

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ned me to it, and also to judge of their importance and force ; and I hope he will excuse me, if, before I offer a vindication of my own, I take the liberty to canvass those which have been entertained by others.

Some, as I observed above, have imagined, that the advice of lenity to the apostles proceeded upon the consideration of *prudence*, as if, in the present humour of the people, it was unsafe to proceed to extremities against their favourites.

But had this been the reason that determined him to advise this measure, what hindered him from speaking out his sentiments plainly, and without disguise ; especially as there were none present but the members of the council, (the apostles having been removed), and therefore he could be under no restraint ?

It may perhaps be thought, that the alteration in the measures of the Sanhedrim, in consequence of his advice, gives countenance to this conjecture with re-

spect to the principle upon which it is supposed to have been given. But had it been a dread of the resentment of the populace that made him advise this caution, does it not deserve to be considered, if the same principle of prudence would not have made *him* remonstrate against, and the *Sanhedrim* abstain from, *whipping* and *scourging* them, as a step equally, if not more, unpolitical than their death, which they first resolved on?

Might he not have told them, that the apostles would consider such treatment as an act of the greatest injustice, and as the rudest indignity that could be offered to them; and therefore would probably watch an opportunity of resenting it? Might he not have told them, that if they had any dread of the spread of their tenets, or the growing success of the religion taught by them, they took the most improper course in the world to prevent either? — That they might be convinced from experience, that the apostles were not
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to be frightened by their menaces into silence; and therefore might conclude, that, irritated by the bad usage given them, they would, how soon they were set at liberty, disseminate their principles with still greater zeal among the people, and use all their influence to stir them up against the authors of the abuse they met with? — That on all these accounts the course they took might prove in the issue more dangerous to them than what they first resolved on, should they have executed it? — That upon the supposition the apostles were put to death, they might, no doubt, lay their account with an uproar among the people, in the first transports of their passion; but that it would soon subside, for want of any proper persons to foment and keep it up; and, in the mean time, that they might comfort themselves with this hope, that, with the apostles themselves, the cause they supported would die also, there being probably none who would undertake the defence of it when they were gone?

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In some such manner, we may suppose, he would have reasoned with the Sanhedrim upon the change of *their* conduct, had he been swayed merely by prudential considerations; and therefore, as we find no such argumentation used with them, the presumption is, that this was not the principle which influenced *his*. But,

What particularly deserves notice here, is, that Gamaliel not only drops no hint of any such dread or suspicion of the people's resentment, as the ground of the advice he offers; but plainly suggests another cause for it, viz. the reason they had to dread the guilt of an opposition to God, should they proceed to extremities against the apostles.

Though there *seems* to be *more*, yet there is *really* as *little* weight in the opinion of those who think, that any favour *Gamaliel* intended the apostles, proceeded from a *party-spirit*,—from a coincidence of their sentiments with those of the *Pharisees*, upon the subject of the resurrection from the dead; and
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out of spite and opposition to the *Sadducees*, who denied it, and are supposed to be the spring of the prosecution carried on against the apostles.

It is acknowledged, that the *Pharisees* and *Sadducees* differed widely in their systems of religion; and that from thence sometimes arose very warm and keen disputes betwixt them. But it is observable, that, however they might be divided upon other occasions, they were united upon this, and, forgetting the little distinctions of a party, concurred in the prosecution of the apostles, from an apprehension of the danger arising to both, on account of their growing influence.

This trial of the apostles, at which *Gamaliel* assisted, happened not long after the crucifixion of their Lord, while the event was yet fresh in every one's remembrance, and the impression it made upon many of the people seemed greatly to prejudice them against the authors of it.

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The charge of his death, which the
apostles

apostles fixed upon the Sanhedrim, seems to have been the thing that at this time *gravelled* them most, especially as it is not improbable but their own consciences might have joined in the reproof. At such a season, and under circumstances such as these, is it to be imagined, that *Gamaliel* would have become an advocate for them, on account of any little support this favourite, but disputed, doctrine of the resurrection, might receive from their countenance? The other Pharisees, members of the Sanhedrim, had equal reason to support them on this account as *Gamaliel* had; but, from the resolution they took against them, it is evident this consideration had no weight with them at that time; and it is difficult to conceive, much more difficult to assign, a good reason for all this zeal in *Gamaliel* for the doctrine of the resurrection, more than in the other Pharisees; especially as he had no less ground of offence given him, by the heavy charge of murder

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der brought against them, than they had.

And, I imagine, the Jews will not reckon themselves greatly obliged to those who make this apology for their doctor; because it represents him as making a sacrifice of the *interests* of *religion* and his *country* to that of a *party*, and as standing up for men he believed to be knaves, for no other reason but because they supported one of the tenets of *their* sect, against those of *another* who impugned it.

It deserves likewise to be considered, that the *Pharisees* did not more differ from the *Sadducees*, upon the subject of the resurrection from the dead, than they did from our Lord and his apostles, upon other points equally important; and therefore is it not natural to think, that an opposition of sentiments in most other points, would have operated more strongly upon *Gamaliel* to concur in a resolution formed against them, than an union of sentiments in

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this single point could have done to procure a mitigation of it? Besides,

Had this been the principle upon which he urged lenity to the apostles, may it not seem strange, that it should never have exerted itself before, tho' there were many as proper occasions for it? particularly, when the Sanhedrim was assembled upon the resurrection of Lazarus, and — the death of Jesus (who performed the miracle, as well as that of Lazarus, who was the subject of it) was resolved on?

It is generally allowed, that *Gamaliel* was, long before this time, the *Nasi*, or *President*, of the Sanhedrim; and it is highly probable, that, upon an occasion so important, the other members would take care that one of his consequence should be present. But it does not appear, that he then so much as offered a word to soften the other judges, though the miracle which brought them together afforded a most striking proof of his favourite doctrine of the resurrection,

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tion, and an equally strong confutation of the sentiments of the Sadducees concerning it; yea, it is very remarkable, that it was the * *Chief Priests* and *Pharisees* (there is not the least mention of the *Sadducees*) who assembled the Sanhedrim upon that occasion, and therefore, it is probable, carried on the prosecution against Jesus. And what good reason can be given, why *Gamaliel* (supposing him present at that meeting) should concur in a most severe resolution against Jesus, when the miracle wrought by him pleaded for the truth of his sentiments, and against those of the Sadducees, with respect to the resurrection, and yet support the apostles for the testimony they gave to it, tho', if admitted in the instance for which they were arraigned, it was a proof of the divine mission of Jesus, and consequently of their guilt in cutting him off?

Nor do I think that the conduct of

* John xi. 47.

the Pharisees in the trial of the apostle *Paul*, mentioned Acts xxiii. will support those who insist on the above-mentioned circumstance as the ground of *Gamaliel's* advice.

From the history of this trial it appears, that *Paul*, when pleading his cause before the Sanhedrim, observing the parties into which they were split, very prudently took the advantage of that circumstance, and managed it with such dexterity and address as to engage the Pharisees on his side, from the consideration of his suffering for preaching the doctrine of the resurrection.

But, from an impartial consideration of *Paul's* circumstances at *that time*, and those of the *other apostles* at *this*, they will appear to have been widely different; and so seem likewise to have been the principles upon which the judges acted:—in *this*, from a principle of *resentment*; in *that*, from a *party-spirit*.

The trial of the apostle Paul happened about *A. D.* 58, when very probably
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most of the members of that Sanhedrim who had condemned our Lord were dead ; and therefore those present at this meeting would be less offended with the charge of his death fixed upon their predecessors in office. Hence we may suppose the members who composed *this* meeting of the Sanhedrim more cool than those of the *former*. There was nothing in the present case that could awaken their resentment as in the other, and therefore it was but natural for those of one sect among them to support the apostle Paul, when run down by those of an opposite faction ; especially when we consider the artful manner in which he interested them in his cause. And though they seemed to have had this advice of *Gamaliel* in their view, and to refer to it when they offered their own ; yet this is no proof, that *he* acted from the same principle that *they* now did. All that can be inferred from their conduct in this affair, is no more than that they approved of *Gamaliel's* moderation in
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the case referred to; and pleaded it as a proper precedent to be followed in this: and therefore I humbly imagine this opinion will not account for *Gamaliel's* conduct; nor do the reasons adduced in support of it in the least weaken ours.

It has been thought by some, that the part *Gamaliel* acted in this affair proceeded from a principle of *moderation*, or an aversion to persecution for the sake of religion.

I acknowledge a spirit of moderation is highly ornamental to any character, and what should ever be inseparable from the character of a *divine* and a *judge*. But what particular reason have we to think, that this was the principal motive to that lenity which he recommended? If, as is generally allowed, he was President of the Sanhedrim from the death of *Simeon* *, (whose son he was), it may seem something strange,

* Lightf. Hor. Hib. et Talmud. in Act. v. 34. p. 657.

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that, during so long a course of years, and the various affairs relating to Christianity which came before that court, this should be the first specimen of his spirit of moderation which we hear of, though no doubt he had many opportunities of expressing it before this time.

But,

Let it be granted, that the advice he offered proceeded from a principle of moderation, are we not, from a comparison of his conduct at this time with what it was formerly, naturally led to conclude, that there must have been some alteration in his sentiments of this *new* religion, when there is so great an alteration in his conduct towards the propagators of it? especially when to this we add, that moderation was by no means the spirit of the Sanhedrim, nor of the sect of the Pharisees, to which he had joined himself? Yea,

Such were the circumstances attending the case of the apostles, that the plea of toleration could upon no other foot be justifiable in him, but upon the
supposition

supposition of his favourable opinion of Christianity, for which they suffered.

I acknowledge the reasonableness of a toleration in matters of religion. It is founded upon the right of private judgement, upon which there can be no invasion without the most manifest injustice, so long as it does not lead to practices hurtful to the interests of society. In such case, a regard to the welfare of the state would challenge the attention and cognisance of its rulers.

Great allowances are to be made for a difference in religious sentiments, because it may consist with integrity, and arise from — a difference of intellectual abilities, — or the different lights in which an object is viewed, — or the different advantages for judging of it. Thus, for instance, should a set of men publish to the world a system of religion, or certain *Esoterick* doctrines, founded merely upon the interpretation of obscure writings, — or upon inward and divine illuminations alledged

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to have been vouchsafed to them; — as in this case there might be room for deception on the part of those who entertained these opinions, so also scope for the exercise of charity in such as judged of them. We might discover their tenets to be crude and indigested, the issue of a distempered brain; and yet ought to bear with them; because their faith in them would appear to be the effect of weakness and disease.

But, I think, it must be allowed, that they have not the same claim to the indulgence of the public, who, having the opportunities of knowing the truth, should profess and maintain a falsehood, and endeavour to support it, with the sanction of their own authority, and an appeal to facts, of which they affirm themselves to have been eye-witnesses; especially if these falsehoods were published in the capital, the seat of magistracy and government, — contained a direct charge of the most atrocious murder against those who were employed in the administration of it, and — were ob-

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stinately persisted in, notwithstanding all the gentle methods that had been taken to bring them to a sense of their duty, and prevent those evils which were like to be the consequences of such a daring violation of it.

This must have been the case of the apostles, supposing them to have been impostors. — The religion they published to the world, they supported by an appeal to certain facts, such as the resurrection, ascension, &c. of their Lord, (in which, as they could not possibly be deceived, there was consequently no room for enthusiasm to act), and offered themselves as evidences for the truth of them. — And therefore, had *Gamaliel* believed the resurrection of Christ, and the miracles wrought both by him and his apostles, to be no more than a trick put upon mankind; must he not, at the same time, have considered the apostles, not as a set of weak and enthusiastic fools, but the most arrant knaves, who were carrying on their designs at the expence of the vilest and most pernicious
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Considered in this light, did not the peace, welfare, and interest of the society, require the cognisance of the magistrate? though not for their speculative opinions, for which they were not answerable at his tribunal, yet for the cheat and imposture they would endeavour to palm upon the world. For, what crime could be so base, which might not claim sanctuary under the name of religion, was a pretended regard to it to be sustained as an apology for those who committed it?

Humanity might perhaps have led *Gamaliel* to commiserate the unhappy fate of the apostles, should they have been, by a judicial sentence, doomed to die. But, at the same time, had he looked on them as designing impostors, (and such he must have considered them, when attesting what they knew to be false), would not the very abilities which

heightened their guilt, have *lessened* his *compassion* for them; and in proportion as they rendered *them* more dangerous, have made *him* more cautious, in giving the least countenance to them? He could not have yet forgot the series of distresses which his country had suffered from the Romans, for the countenance, little as it was, which some impostors had lately met with; and therefore would not this have suggested, to so wise a man, the necessity of giving an immediate check to the authors or propagators of any new imposture of the like kind, and consequently to the apostles, had he considered them as such, lest the Romans, taking umbrage at the indulgence shewn them, and suspecting from thence, that the people in general were meditating a revolt, might come upon them with double vengeance, and destroy their country?

We have already observed, that, considering the facts upon which the apostles rested the truth of the religion they preached, there was no room for mistake,

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take, and consequently none for the operation of enthusiasm, in the account they gave of them; and therefore that *Gamaliel*, had he believed these things to be false, must have considered the apostles as impostors of such a detestable character, that even *moderation* itself could plead nothing in their favour.

But, for argument's sake, let us suppose he could look upon the concern they took in this cause, as more the effect of weakness and enthusiasm than of bad design, is this the course his wisdom would have advised? No doubt, as in such case their weakness would have challenged pity, he might have very properly advised to refrain from them, — to let them alone, — and to dismiss them as below the notice of the court, and too insignificant to be minded by the government; but surely he would never have insinuated, that, in opposing them, and the cause they espoused, they might be found in the issue to be *fighting against God*, as if *their* cause was *his*. — This would have been paying a compliment

pliment to them, which the highest *moderation* could not require, and *common sense*, or even *honesty*, would not allow. So that, had he considered them as impostors, either weak or designing, it is abundantly evident, that moderation could not have advised the measures which he pursued himself, or recommended to the court; and therefore it would be unreasonable to ascribe his conduct in favour of the apostles to the influence of this principle.

Mr Lardner having occasion, upon the subject of the Roman *census*, or enrolment, in the time of Cyrenius, to mention this passage of history, offers an opinion * with respect to the principle upon which *Gamaliel* acted, that to me appears pretty extraordinary; and which therefore, from its connection with the subject of this essay, I cannot pass over without a few remarks.

Judas of Galilee, he observes, professed a regard for the liberties of his coun-

* Lardn. Credib. &c. vol. 2. p. 662.

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trymen, and advised them to stand out against any such taxes or imposts as the Romans might attempt to load them with; alledging, that it would be a reproach to them, who had lived so long under a kind of theocracy, to submit to the yoke of any temporal lord *; — that, to defeat the design of enslaving his country, he put himself at the head of a body of resolute fellows; and — that, though his enterprize was defeated at that time, yet the principles upon which it was undertaken, subsisted, and were long afterwards in being †. And further he observes, that *Gamaliel* seems to insinuate some hopes, that the apostles had adopted the same principles, and were proceeding, though perhaps with more caution, upon the same plan with *Judas*; and that to this was owing the great success of *Gamaliel's* reasoning, and the service he did to the apostles at that time ‡.

* Lardn. Credib. &c. vol. 2. p. 652. 653.

† Ibid. p. 666.

‡ Ibid. p. 668.

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This is the substance of his opinion upon this subject.—Mr Lardner has justly acquired great honour in the republic of letters by his learned writings. However, with all due deference to an author of so great merit, I beg leave to differ from him in his opinion upon this subject; and that because, I humbly imagine, it does not naturally arise out of *Gamaliel's* speech, and seems to be opposed by the accounts we have of the conduct of the apostles with respect to religion, and the conduct of the Sanhedrim towards them.

It is true, as Mr Lardner observes, *Gamaliel* speaks of *Theudas* with contempt:—*Before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be some body.*—But it is far from being evident, at least to me, that he had not *Judas* in equal contempt. At first reading, one is naturally led to think, he had no high opinion of either; and an attention to his design, and his reasoning in support of it, serves to confirm this conjecture.

One thing he evidently had in view
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was, by softening the council, to procure some favour to the apostles. In pursuance of this design, he advises caution, and a delay; and insinuates, that a short time would determine whether this work was of men or not, as it had done in the cases of *Theudas* and *Judas*; and — that, if it was of men, it could expect no better issue than theirs had before; and — therefore, that they needed not be over-hasty or severe in their measures against those who supported it.

It is true, Mr Lardner supposes *Gamaliel* to pursue the same pacific measures towards the apostles; but by giving a different turn to his words, the force of his argument is this*.

“ *Theudas* and his measures came to
 “ nothing. After him *Judas* rose up.
 “ He himself perished, and his people
 “ were dispersed; but yet his principles
 “ prevail. If this counsel, or this work,
 “ be of men, [*as Theudas's was*], it will

* Lardn. Credib. &c. vol. 2. 667.

“ come to nought [*as his did.*] But, if
 “ it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it.
 “ Ye may punish these men, and put
 “ an end to their lives; but, if their
 “ principles be of God, they will pre-
 “ vail notwithstanding; and all the is-
 “ sue will be, that you will contract
 “ guilt, and fight against God, but in
 “ vain.”

Had what is alledged above by Mr Lardner been really the sentiments of *Gamaliel*, with respect to *Theudas* and *Judas*, what hindered him from plainly declaring them? — Why, we are told,
 “ It is not to be supposed, that *Gamaliel*
 “ should expressly say, Judas’s design
 “ was of God.” — But, why not? “ Be-
 “ cause,” says he, “ however the chief
 “ men of the Jewish nation might ap-
 “ prove his principles, they were wiser
 “ than openly espouse them: they left
 “ that to the common people.” But,
 though prudence might determine them
 to study a reserve before the populace;
 yet there was no occasion for it among
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there were none present when he spake but the members of the Sanhedrim.

Had *Gamaliel* entertained such different sentiments of *Theudas* and *Judas*, and intended to make such use of their history, which he quotes, would it not be more natural to think, he would have ranged his argument in this manner?—Refrain from these men: for before these days rose up *Theudas*, boasting himself to be some body, to whom a number of men, about 400, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. And if this counsel, or this work, is of men, [*as his was*], it will come to nought likewise. But, you must also remember, that, after this man, rose up *Judas of Galilee*, in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him. He also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dismissed; but his principles still prevail. And if this work be of God, [*as his was*], ye cannot overthrow it.——But, in place of this, does it not

deserve to be noticed, that, not after mentioning the insurrection of *Theudas*, and the unsuccessful issue of it, — not till he had mentioned that of *Judas* likewise, does he add, *Now, if this counsel, or this work, be of men, it will come to nought?* thus modestly hinting, that what he mentioned immediately before (viz. the work set on foot by *Judas*), he suspected to be the work of men, as well as that of *Theudas*, which he mentioned first.

It is readily acknowledged, that the principles of *Judas* continued to prevail long after his death, and the suppression of that party which he headed in person: but I cannot see it at all probable, that *Gamaliel* imagined the apostles were pursuing the same plan, or acting upon the same principles, with *Judas*; or that the Sanhedrim appear to have thought so, by the manner of their conduct towards them.

It is not denied, but the apostles of our Lord were deeply tinctured with the prejudices of their early education,
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and, for a considerable time after they became his disciples, seemed to entertain the highest expectations of secular interest and honour under him, as a temporal prince; yea, very possibly, these hopes might have had their weight with some of them, in determining them at first to join themselves to him. But, whatever visionary and flattering hopes of earthly power, riches, and grandeur, they might have entertained during our Lord's life, and perhaps for some time after his resurrection; yet it is evident, from the history we have of them, that after his ascension, and the effusion of the Holy Ghost upon them at Pentecost, they publicly disclaimed all such hopes, and preached their Lord under a character quite different from that of a temporal Messiah.—Neither their lives nor their doctrines favour in the least of pride, vain-glory, or an ambition for the power and greatness of this world. How then could *Gamaliel* imagine they acted from any such principle? Had they taken the probable means of advancing

vancing a temporal kingdom, they might have been suspected of some ambitious and interested views; but as the course they took was so diametrically opposite to any such aim, how could *Gamaliel*, or any other, imagine they had it? The rulers, it is evident, were so far from thinking them abettors of the scheme and principles of *Judas*, that they considered them as enemies, not only to the religion, but also to the liberties of their country*; and in this character they prosecuted and punished them: Whereas, had their opinion of them been such as Mr Lardner represents, they would rather have given them all the countenance in their power.

I know some have thought, (and very probably many may be of this opinion), that *Gamaliel*, from the *uncertainty* he was in with respect to Christianity, whether it was from God or not, recommended the greatest caution to the Sanhedrim in their procedure towards the

* John xi. 48. 49. 50.

apostles,

apostles, the first ministers of it, till they should be resolved in their doubts concerning it.

I own, that, in some cases, the arguments for and against a proposition may be so exactly balanced, that the mind may, for some time, remain, as it were, *in æquilibrio*,—at a loss to determine on which side the truth lies. But, at the same time, I think it must be owned, that such cases are but rare; and whether the present be one of that number, is now under consideration, and must be difficult, if possible, positively to determine.

All that the case can admit of, or the argument deduced from it requires, is only to ascertain on which side the greater weight seems to lie. And I cannot help thinking, after the most mature deliberation, that *Gamaliel* was in no such uncertainty about the merits of Christianity, as some may, at first, imagine from his words.

It is true, his manner of expression would, at first sight, and to a superficial reader,

reader, seem to insinuate some doubt concerning the origin of this new religion: *If this work, &c.*—But, I imagine, it may, from a due attention to his design, be very consistently explained, without inferring any such doubt, suspicion, or uncertainty.

The Sanhedrim was, at this time, highly incensed against the apostles, and meditated nothing less than their immediate destruction.—*Gamaliel* laboured to bring them into milder measures, by shewing them, that the severity they proposed was, in no view they could take of the matter, justifiable. It was not to be expected, that, in the mood they were then in, he should have flatly told them, that the cause the apostles supported, and they opposed, was the cause, not of man, but of God. But he reasoned with them upon either of these suppositions, and shewed them, that, in the one case, (*if this work was of men*), their severity was needless, because it would soon come to nought, and die away of itself, as the projects of

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Theudas and *Judas* had done; and in the other case, (*if this work was of God*), that their opposition was equally foolish and impious, because they heightened their own guilt, but could not destroy it. And thus, with an admirable dexterity, he suggested hints sufficient to have brought them to reflection; — cautiously avoided whatever, by rankling, might have prevented it; and by these means promoted his design, without avowedly taking a side; which, as I shall shew afterwards, would not, at that time, have been prudent, either for himself or the apostles.

I might adduce several pieces of parallel reasoning from sacred history, in illustration and support of our opinion upon this. One instance very similar to this is the reasoning of the prophet *Elijah* with the people of *Israel*, 1 Kings xviii. 21. *How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.* Does the prophet, by the manner in which he here reasons, insinuate the least suspicion

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or doubt with respect to the true God? No. The history plainly shews, that he had the fullest assurance of the title of the God of Israel to this character, and of the vanity of those pretensions that were made to it by the other. But the case stood thus:—Under the administration of the wicked *Ahab*, the worship of the true God had been forbidden, and that of *Baal* enjoined throughout the kingdom, under the pain of his displeasure. Of the Israelites, it is probable, some adhered to the true God, some went over to *Baal*, and others perhaps worshipped neither.—Elijah reproves them for that suspense in which they seemed to indulge themselves, *for halting between two opinions*,—advises bringing the matter to an issue, and regulating their conduct accordingly.—*If the Lord be God, &c.* He appeals to their own reason how far their conduct was justifiable; and shews, without giving any decision in the case, that, whatever side of the question they took, it could not be vindicated.—But, not to insist more on this instance, or
 mention

mention any other of a similar nature, let us examine the case before us a little more narrowly.

The causes which ordinarily produce uncertainty, with respect to a matter of fact, are, — either the want of sufficient evidence, — or the want of a due consideration of it, — or both. But neither of these seem to have been wanting in the present case.

God had, by his prophets, foretold the advent of the Messiah; and it was, therefore, natural to expect, that his character would be described with such precision as might enable any candid inquirer to judge of the claims that might be made to it. The very supposition of any defect in this, would be an imputation both on the wisdom and goodness of God. Do, then, but consider how uneasy a state of suspense must be, especially in a matter of the last importance, as this was, and in which mankind in general, and the Jews in particular, were so deeply interested; and is it not probable, that *Gamaliel*

would not neglect an inquiry into the claim made by our Saviour to this character and dignity, though his obligations to it, from his station and office, had not been so great, as we shall afterwards endeavour to make it appear they were? And if we have reason to think that he made this inquiry, it is far from being improbable, that a favourable opinion of Christianity might be the result of it. But,

What still more strengthens this presumption, is, that his conduct, upon this occasion, does not seem to correspond with the supposition of doubt or uncertainty; but may, with the greatest propriety, be reconciled to the favourable opinion we suppose him to have of Christianity. Had he entertained a doubt about it, is it not natural to think, that his anxiety, heightened by his concern in the issue of it, would have proposed an inquiry into the evidences which it offered?—That he would have advised an examination of the prophecies concerning the time of the Messiah's appearance,

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pearance, — the nature of his kingdom, — his character, and — the credentials he brought along with him to support it? especially as it is acknowledged*, that the Sanhedrim, which sat at Jerusalem, challenged to itself the prerogative of judging in all claims made by any to the character of a prophet.

One entirely indifferent about religion, would perhaps give himself no trouble, either in proposing or making such inquiries; but it can as little be imagined, that one, under serious impressions of the importance of religion, and a dread of the guilt of a criminal opposition to it, (which seems to have been the state of *Gamaliel's* mind at this time), would, in such a case, allow himself to remain in suspense, when he had access to the means by which he might arrive at certainty.

But what is the method he proposes? In place of advising them to canvass the

* Lightf. Hor. Hib. & Talmud. in Act. ix. 2.
p. 681. See also Luke xiii. 33.

subject immediately, he is for referring the determination of it to an event that might be at a considerable distance, and more fit to be judged of by succeeding generations than by that. He advises to let things take their course, in the mean time, without controul, and that the event would determine whether the cause was patronized by God or not:—A course this extremely improper, supposing him to have entertained any doubt concerning the resurrection of Christ, or the other evidences of his religion; but equally wise, if he was a friend to it, because it would all at once procure the liberty of the apostles, as it would furnish the Sanhedrim in a decent off- come, by putting the determination of the controversy at such a distance, that they had no chance of seeing it; and thus saving them from the disgrace that might have fallen upon them, from the issue of a more compendious inquiry and speedy decision. But,

“ If he had any such favourable opinion of Christianity as is supposed,

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“ why, may it be asked, did he not
“ speak it out?”

I acknowledge he seems to speak with a kind of reserve, and leaves the council to infer his sentiments from this short hint, rather than open declaration of them. But, if I mistake not, a consideration of the circumstances in which he was placed will shew his prudence in this manner of behaviour. The case was nice and delicate; and, in his present situation, to serve the cause of Christianity, and save the apostles, required great address. He was now addressing himself to the avowed enemies of Jesus Christ;—to those who, since the commencement of his public ministry, had carried on a stated opposition to him, and who, after many fruitless attempts, thought they had at last ruined his cause, by cutting him off;—to those whose pride was piqued at the growing reputation and success of his religion, and chagreened at the decline of their own power and influence, which sunk in proportion as that of
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his apostles advanced;—to those who, however satisfied of the truth of the resurrection of Jesus, had not honesty enough to own it, but seem to have abandoned themselves entirely to the influence of prejudice, pride, and resentment;—to a junto of men, whose resentment, formerly keen, was now inflamed to the highest degree against the prisoners for the charge of murder they had openly exhibited against them; inflamed to such a degree, that they could not dissemble it, but, forgetting the regard due to justice and character, betrayed it, not only in the measures they resolved on against the apostles, but also in the precipitant manner in which they entered into them, without so much as the formality of a trial or proof.

In such circumstances, what should he do? The Sanhedrim seem, at this time, to have been under the influence of the most boisterous passions,—all in a fury. To have entered into a long argumentation with them, in such a mood, would have been vain. They
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had neither patience nor temper for it. To have told them plainly, that he believed the resurrection and Messiahship of Jesus, would have been imprudent, — highly dangerous, both to the apostles and himself. An open declaration of his *own* sentiments, at this time, would have been construed an oblique condemnation of *theirs*. In such circumstances, opposition, like a dike before an impetuous torrent, would only have made their rage swell the higher, and, like the same torrent broken over its banks, spread the wider, and do the more havock. Prudence, delicacy, and judgement, therefore, became necessary; and I humbly imagine the conduct of *Gamaliel* discovers them all.

At this critical juncture, all that was left for prudence to do, was only to mitigate; and does not *Gamaliel* seem very dexterously to have done this, not only by artfully avoiding whatever could in the least degree irritate, but carefully studying whatever had a tendency to soothe them? In such circumstances,

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persons sensible of a wrong conduct (which, as we have shewn already, seems to have been the case of the Sanhedrim) must be reasoned with, as if it was not perceived. The least notice taken of it would immediately alarm their pride, and push them on to the most desperate measures, rather than, by an alteration of them, seem to acknowledge it. *Gamaliel*, therefore, not unacquainted with this foible of human nature, very prudently accommodates himself to it, and makes his advantage of it: though no doubt he must have perceived signs of the deepest remorse in the members of the Sanhedrim, he seems to take no notice of them, but reasons all along with them, as if he had observed none. It is true he drops a hint of the danger they run, should the cause the apostles supported be found to be the cause of God; but even this hint he gives in such manner as expresses a tender concern for the safety of his colleagues and country, while at the same time he provides by it for the safety of the

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the apostles, and the success of the religion which they preached. Such manner of conduct in *Gamaliel* was not only prudent for himself and the apostles, but also respectful to the court. But,

As it is not easy, in an affair in which one is warmly interested, so to disguise his sentiments as not to be perceived *, it is highly probable the Sanhedrim might have observed *Gamaliel's*. What makes this the more likely is, the alteration in the measures they first resolved on, immediately upon the motion made by him; an alteration to which possibly they might be moved, either by a regard to his judgement, or, which is as probable, by the secret hopes of retaining him as a member of their court: afraid, no doubt, at the same time, lest, by a rigid adherence to their first resolution, they might provoke him

* A remarkable proof of the justness of this observation, is Cæsar's speech in the Catiline affair. *Sallust*.

openly to declare against them, and thereby the opposite party should be greatly increased, and they exposed to disgrace, if not, in their turn, to the fury and resentment of the populace, who were already greatly incensed against them. In this manner do the Sanhedrim seem to have acted, partly from a principle of policy, and partly, perhaps, to silence their own consciences, remonstrating against the severity resolved on. But yet, as nothing can be more inconsistent than the conduct of persons alternately under the convictions of guilt, and the influence of pride and passion, they would not dismiss the apostles without some marks of their displeasure, lest they should betray what, above all things, they laboured most to conceal from the public eye, — the remorse and anguish of their guilty minds. And though, no doubt, *Gamaliel* would think the treatment they at last resolved on, both severe and unjust; yet it is at least doubtful, if, in such situation, *silence* was not the truest *prudence*.

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Considering the temper the judges were in,—that he seems to have stood alone, and to have had none to support him in any plea he might offer for the apostles, he might reckon himself happy in procuring such a mitigation of the measures resolved on against them, and had reason to suspect, that, should he have attempted to carry his influence farther, and insist on more, he might lose what he had already obtained.

Let these circumstances be attended to, and I submit, if they do not, in a great measure, account for that reserve and caution with which *Gamaliel* spoke and acted; and if the course he took was not what might have been expected from any wise man, in such a ticklish situation, who had a favourable opinion of Christianity, and meant to do it, or those who supported it, a service. Whereas, had he thought otherwise of it, his conduct is quite irreconcilable with such opinion, or that wisdom for which he was so highly celebrated. In this case he could be under no restraint,

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as in the other, because the judges were *all* well disposed to hearken to any thing he might have to offer against it; and therefore, as every circumstance seemed to invite all freedom in speaking out whatever he had to say against the apostles, or the cause in which they were engaged, his very silence is a presumption of his favourable sentiments of it.

To what has been observed above, in confirmation of *Gamaliel's* attachment to Christianity, I beg leave to add, that not only does the appearance he made for the apostles at this meeting of the council, seem to favour the interpretation I have given of it, but this is still more corroborated by an account, from sacred history, of some facts, which happened both *before* and *after* this meeting of the Sanhedrim. It is observed *, that *among the* chief rulers *also* many *believed on him* (i. e. Jesus); *but because of the Pharisees, they did not confess him, lest they should be turned out*

* John xii. 42.

of the synagogues. But I do not remember that any of them had, before this trial of the apostles, at which *Gamaliel* assisted, declared for Jesus, except *Nicodemus*, and *Joseph of Arimathea*; and yet, from the manner in which the historian speaks, we should be apt to imagine there were certainly more. Is it not, therefore, probable, that *Gamaliel* might be another of those who believed; and that the providence of God, who knew how to make the *wisdom* and *authority* of a *judge*, as well as the *zeal* of a *martyr*, serve his cause, had reserved his appearance to this time, when it might be so remarkably advantageous to it? Advantageous it seems indeed to have been, not only in procuring the release of the apostles, but also in promoting their success, and gaining over proselytes to the Christian faith. For, as is observed in the following chapter *, *In those days, the number of the disciples was multiplied. And the word of God increased;*

* Acts vi. 1. 7.

and

and the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly ; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

I do not remember to have seen a satisfactory account given of the occasion of the conversion of so many priests. That which Dr Doddridge gives *, is, in my humble opinion, far from being satisfactory, or even probable. His account of the matter is as follows: “ It is probable the miracle of rending the veil of the temple, and the testimony of the guards to the truth of the resurrection, (which some of the chief of that order heard, and might perhaps be whispered to some others), might contribute considerably towards their conversion, in concurrence with the miraculous gifts and powers of the apostles, the most convincing proofs of which they saw before their eyes in their own temple.” Whether these things might not have contributed to their conversion, I shall not take up-

* Dod. Fam. Expof. vol. 3. p. 81. note (b).

on me positively to say; but one thing I may venture to affirm, that they do not seem to have been the immediate or principal causes of it. Nor do I see how these events, the most of which had happened a considerable time before, can, with any propriety, be assigned as the occasion of these conversions, which, from the manner and order in which they are spoken of, would seem not to have happened till after this famous meeting of the Sanhedrim. A more probable account of the matter is suggested by Luke, who was a very exact historian, from the *manner* and *connection* of the narrative, both which deserve attention.

The account we have of the conversion of great numbers, and especially of a great company of priests, is immediately subjoined to the account given of this trial of the apostles, and the conduct of the Sanhedrim towards them; and so, from such connection, the sacred historian would seem to insinuate, that the one was occasioned by the o-

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ther; and yet, without considering the part *Gamaliel* acted in this affair, as a presumption of his favourable sentiments of Christianity, it will be hard to account for its producing such an extraordinary effect; particularly upon *many* of the *priests*, who, by embracing Christianity, would not only expose themselves to the resentment of those in power, but to the loss of their office, and all the gainful emoluments arising from it. Whereas the appearance he makes for the apostles at this famous council, considered as an evidence of his attachment to their cause, joined with the alteration thereby brought about in the measures of the court, will naturally enough support the account which the historian gives of the following events, extraordinary as they were: for nothing could be more natural, than for many of the people, and even of the priests, to become obedient to the Christian faith, when they considered, that one of the most celebrated of their rulers and teachers stood up for it; and that,

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that, in consequence of what was advanced by him on this subject, the rest seem to have altered their mind, as well as measures, and to have entertained at least some doubt, if not more, that the cause the apostles supported, and they opposed, might be the cause of God.

Nor needs it seem at all surprising, that the sacred historian does not take notice expressly of *Gamaliel's* attachment to Christianity:—His silence can infer nothing against it.—Besides,

It may be observed, that any instances mentioned by the apostles, of remarkable conversions to Christianity, are generally, if not always, such as are connected with some remarkable facts, taken notice of as the occasion of them *; and where this is not the case, they never shew a vain parade or ostentation, in hauling them into their writings.

This observation may perhaps account

* See the account of *Dionysius the Areopagite*, Acts xvii. 34.; — of *Cornelius*, Acts x. 1.; — of *Sergius Paulus*, Acts xiii. 12.

for Luke's silence with respect to *Gamaliel's* conversion; because, however certain he might be of the fact, he might be ignorant of the precise time or occasion of it; and, therefore, at a loss for the proper place in which to mention it, might satisfy himself with such a hint of it at that time, as might suggest the notice of it to succeeding ages; — and for that age in which he wrote, there was perhaps no occasion of being more particular, as it might have been a fact well enough known.

Thus the sacred history seems to favour the conjecture of *Gamaliel's* conversion to Christianity; nor is profane history entirely silent concerning it. The least hint of it is not to be expected in the Jewish writings, for reasons at first sight obvious; but *Calmet* tells us *, “ That it is not doubted but

“ *Gamaliel*

* *Vide* Calmet's dictionary, under the article *Gamaliel*. — He says, “ That, after the death of St Stephen, Gamaliel encouraged the Christians to
“ go by night, and carry off his body; and that he

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“ *Gamaliel* embraced the faith of Jesus
 “ Christ, though at what time he was
 “ converted, or by whom he was bap-
 “ tized,

“ lent them his own coach, to go and bury it in the
 “ lands belonging to him, seven or eight leagues
 “ distant from Jerufalem, which, from him, were
 “ called *Caphar Gamala*, i. e. *Gamala*, or *Gamaliel's*
 “ field;” (*Lucian. de Sancto Stephano, c. 5. ad fi-*
nem.) — He adds, from *Lucian*, “ There was
 “ a body found with St Stephen's, which they
 “ say was *Gamaliel's*; and this they make a proof
 “ of his Christianity, who was a zealous Pharisee.

“ They have *Gamaliel's* epitaph at Pifa, from
 “ which it appears, that they reverence him as a
 “ faint, and accordingly direct their prayers to him :

“ Sanctus Gamaliel, Abybas, & Nicodemus,
 “ Infimul ipse pater, filius, atque nepos;
 “ Hoc epigramma legens, horum suffragia quære,
 “ Teque recommendans, posce salutis opem.”

Vide Basnage Hist. de Juifs, t. 3.

The above account of *Gamaliel*, I readily acknowledge, favours of the legend, and is made use of by the church of Rome to answer the purposes of superstition. But, as fictions are generally founded upon realities, and the belief of the one is necessary to give a credibility to the other, this much it seems to hint to us, that, antecedent to their veneration for *Gamaliel*, and their applications to him as a faint, there prevailed a belief of his conversion to Christianity: for, it is well enough known, that this church, so justly celebrated for its policy, takes the
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“tized, no body knows;” (*Lucian. de Sanct. Steph.*).

To what has been offered in support of *Gamaliel*'s favourable opinion of Christianity, as the principle upon which he advised lenity to the apostles, I know

advantage of the opinions that are most currently believed, and upon these grafts some branch of their superstition, that, by these means, it may have a more ready and undisputed reception among the people, and the greater force and efficacy upon them. This remark upon the practice of the Romish church, is, in a variety of instances, beautifully illustrated and confirmed in Dr Middleton's letter from Rome.

Upon the same principle, the learned Mr Shuckford (*Connect. of Sacr. and Prof. Hist. vol. 3.*) accounts for the rise of a great part of the Heathen mythology, and shews, that it was not altogether mere fiction, the work of a poetic fancy or imagination, but had a real foundation in history and matter of fact, though so obscured by the drapery in which the poet dressed it, that, when exhibited to after ages, they could scarce find out the original from which it was taken; and thus the *history* was in danger of being lost in the *fable*. And therefore, from the above observations, is it not presumable, that the church of Rome would not have attempted to canonise *Gamaliel*, or take him into their kalendar, if they had not found a previous disposition for it in the people, arising from a general belief of his conversion, and good services to Christianity?

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several objections will be started by those who are not disposed to admit it.

Some have considered the violent persecution carried on by *Paul* against the Christians, as a presumption against the favourable sentiments we suppose *Gama-riel* to have had of their religion, from an opinion, that Paul, had he known his late master to have had such an attachment to it as is alledged, would not have acted the part he did. A few words are only necessary to expose the weakness of this objection.

When St Paul was converted to the Christian faith, is not agreed on. *Spanheim* is of opinion, that his conversion happened about the fourth year of *Caligula*, i. e. A. D. 40.; but many other chronologers place it some years sooner; and therefore it is highly probable, that his education at the school of *Gamaliel* must have been over a considerable time before this famous meeting of the Sanhedrim at which *Gamaliel* assisted; and consequently that, when Paul was attending his school, he might have been

been as zealous against Christianity as Paul himself was afterwards, and have contributed not a little to strengthen the prejudices of his scholars against it. Hence it is not to be wondered, that Paul should have engaged with such keenness against the votaries of this religion; especially if to the force of early prejudice we add the consideration of the natural fire and warmth of his temper, and — the prospect of honour and interest, which his ambition would not fail to display before him, and represent as attainable by the patronage of those in supreme power and authority.

But though the considerations I have just now taken notice of might have engaged Paul in a violent persecution of the Christians, yet it can with no certainty be concluded, that an alteration of *Gamaliel's* sentiments with respect to the religion of Jesus, would have occasioned an alteration in Paul's measures towards those who professed it; yea, it is highly probable, that the perpetual hurry and flutter he was in, occasioned
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by his juvenile ardour, would not allow him time for the examination of the evidences of this new religion, while yet the principles of ambition and interest would not fail to operate powerfully upon him, and confirm him in his prejudices against it.

It is generally acknowledged, that the Sanhedrim at Jerusalem, either had, or assumed a power over the several synagogues; but is it not observable, that Paul does not apply immediately to the Sanhedrim, or to the President of it, but to the High Priest, for the commission he wanted against the Christians at Damascus *? It is true, it appears probable, that the letters he received were granted in the name of the Sanhedrim †. However, does it not deserve to be inquired, whether Paul's application to the High Priest, upon this occasion, might not have proceeded from his having heard that *Gamaliel*

* Acts ix. 1. 2.

† Acts xxii. 5. & xxvi. 12.

had by this time retired from the Sanhedrim; or — from a suspicion that (if he was still a member of it) he would refuse the commission he was so anxious about; or — at least from the hopes of better success with the court, by the influence of the High Priest, who (it is generally thought) was *Cajaphas*, an enemy as furious against Christianity as *Paul* could then have possibly been? But, whatever may be in these conjectures, (for I mention them only as such), I cannot see, that the persecution carried on by *Paul* against the Christians can afford the smallest presumption, that *Gamaliel*, under whom he had studied long before, still continued an enemy to them likewise.

It is reported, that *Onkelos*, the author of the *Targum*, burnt seventy pound weight of perfumes at *Gamaliel's* funeral; and thence it has been inferred by some, that he died, as he lived, a Jew.

Before I happened to look into Dr Prideaux's connection of sacred, &c. I was apt to imagine, that this story of
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Onkelos (if there was any foundation for it) might have had a reference, not to our *Gamaliel*, but to some other of that name. What induced me to be of this opinion was, that there were at least other two of this name, besides him, Presidents of the Sanhedrim; and that most of the writers who mention this story, neglect to inform us to which of the three it referred. Dr *Prideaux* indeed puts the matter beyond question; and tells us expressly, that *Gamaliel* the elder was the person spoken of. The respect which *Onkelos* is here said to have shewn for *Gamaliel*, he takes notice of, not as a proof of his having died a Jew, but as one of the arguments adduced by the Jewish writers to prove, that the Targum, written by *Onkelos*, was not so old as that written by *Jonathan Ben Uzziel*. What regard may be due to these Rabbinical writings, by which this story is handed down to us, I cannot take upon me to determine, because I am not acquainted with their character; but it is evident the Doctor seems

to pay them very little, and to be of opinion, that *Onkelos* must have composed his Targum much sooner than they would insinuate; yea, much nearer the times of *Ezra* and *Daniel* than they seem inclined to allow. This, he thinks, may be inferred from the purity of his style, the near resemblance it bears to theirs, and its want of many of those corruptions which crept into the Chaldee dialect after the subjection of the Jews to the Roman yoke under *Pompey* *. And if this opinion of Dr Prideaux (which is far from being an improbable one) is admitted, the objection will, all at once, fall to the ground. But what makes it still more probable, that this tale of *Onkelos* was all fiction, (contrived very probably to bring down the date of his Targum), is this, that had *Gamaliel* died a Jew, and *Onkelos* been then alive, and assisted at his funeral, it is not likely, that he alone should be taken notice of as paying

* See Prideaux's Connect. &c. v. 2. p. 535. 543.

such regard to his memory ; yea, I think it is probable we should hear of all the grandees and rulers assembling upon this occasion, and attending the funeral obsequies of so great a man ; and therefore, as I don't remember to have heard it alledged, that any such thing happened, the silence of antiquity concerning it seems rather to countenance the opinion of *Gamaliel's* dying a Christian. But, whatever may be in this, it is evident, that the uncertainty there is about the period of time at which *Onkelos* lived, and the strong presumptions there are, that it must have been earlier than is insinuated by the objection, must quite destroy the force of it, and so leave the conjecture of *Gamaliel's* favourable opinion of Christianity in its full force.

If these objections are not admitted, there is another, which perhaps will be adduced with an air of triumph, as quite in point and decisive ; I mean that *prayer* which was used in the Jewish synagogues, and in which the Christians
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are supposed to be meant by the apostates and heretics there mentioned.

Gamaliel is said to be the author of this prayer; and hence it is alledged, that, had his opinion of Christianity been as favourable as we have supposed, he would never have so characterised those who made a profession of it. The objection is specious, and deserves an answer.

The prayer, as translated by Dr *Prideaux* from *Maimonides*, runs thus *:

“ Let there be no hope for them who
 “ apostatise from the true religion; and
 “ let *heretics*, how many soever they be,
 “ all perish as in a moment. And let
 “ the kingdom of pride be speedily
 “ rooted out, and broken in our days.
 “ Blessed art thou, O Lord, our God,
 “ who destroyest the wicked, and bring-
 “ est down the proud.”

To give this objection any force, it is incumbent upon those who plead it to prove, that *Gamaliel* was the author of

* *Prid. Connect. &c. v. i. p. 377.*

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this prayer ; — that it was composed by him posterior to this appearance of his at the Sanhedrim ; and — that it was pointed against the Christians. Without a proof, a bare assertion of these things must go for nothing ; and therefore, as no proof has been adduced in support of it, we might, without any more ado, dismiss the objection as groundless, for aught that appears to the contrary. However, as some have imagined, from the confident manner in which it has been urged, that there must be some foundation for it, we shall examine the matter a little ; and I hope, in the issue, it will appear, that there is none.

This prayer has long passed under *Gamaliel's* name ; but how it came at first to be ascribed to him, and since to be generally received as his, I shall not take upon me to say. Dr *Lightfoot* *, who was more conversant in the Jewish and Rabbinical writings than any other

* Hor. Heb. et Talmud. v. 2. p. 15. 657.

I know, expressly ascribes this prayer, not to *Gamaliel*, but to *Samuel the Little*. *Calmet* * says, that it was *Samuel the Less* who composed the prayer against heretics, ever since solemnly recited in the synagogues. And Dr *Prideaux* † owns, that, though by some it was ascribed to *Gamaliel*, yet others think it was added to the Jewish liturgy by *Samuel the Little*, one of his scholars. And to this let me add, that if this prayer was made a part of the Jewish liturgy, as *Prideaux* alledges, only a little before the destruction of Jerusalem, there must be a mistake in stating it to *Gamaliel's* account; because, according to Dr *Lightfoot*, and even *Prideaux* himself, he died, in an advanced age, eighteen years before it ‡. From what has been observed above, the presumption, I think, is, that this prayer was the com-

* Vide his Dictionary, under the article *Gamaliel*.

† *Prid. Connect.* v. 1. p. 377. n. (e).

‡ *Hor. Heb. &c.* v. 2. p. 657. — *Prid. Connect.* &c. v. 2. p. 529. 535.

position of *Samuel the Little*. It is true, indeed, Dr *Lightfoot*, though clear upon this point, says, that *Gamaliel* approved of it; and this, if admitted, must give the argument from it the same force as if the composition had been actually his own.

But even upon this supposition, before any thing could be inferred from it, against the principle upon which his advice to the Sanhedrim is alledged to have been given, it would be necessary to fix or ascertain the date of his approbation of it; because, if prior to the appearance he makes for the apostles at this time, it is evident, that though it might be admitted as a specimen of his sentiments of Christianity at that particular juncture, (if Christianity was at all in his view); yet it can by no means infer, that he never altered them afterwards. And yet, important as it would be to those who would avail themselves of his approbation of this prayer, to prove that it was posterior to this trial

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of the apostles, I do not know that it has ever been so much as attempted.

But, for argument's sake, let it be admitted, that this prayer was actually written by *Gamaliel* himself, and in the last period of his life; which is granting as much as our adversaries can desire, and more than they had reason to expect; yet still there is something wanting to support their conclusion from it.

What evidence is there, that this prayer was so much as intended against the Christians? From the prayer itself it will not be alledged that there is any. They are never once named in it. Why might it not respect others? Were there none they accounted heretics but Christians? Yea, were there not many to whom the epithet of *proud*, given these heretics, would more justly apply, even according to the judgement of a Jew, than to the primitive Christians? They were remarkably humble; and therefore is it not presumable, that others, not they, were meant in this prayer?

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prayer? Yea, if I mistake not, something like a proof may be brought to shew, that the *Sadducees* were the heretics pointed at. To evince this, allow me to observe, that *Samuel* the *Little* is said *, at the desire of *Gamaliel*, to have formed a prayer against the *Sadducees*. The ancient Jewish liturgy, which is said to have been composed by Ezra and the great synagogue †, it is acknowledged consisted but of eighteen prayers, and was thence called *Shemoneh Eshreh*: their liturgy now contains nineteen. Is it not therefore probable, that this prayer by *Samuel* was what completed the present number? and likewise that the prayer above quoted, against heretics, and that composed by *Samuel* against the *Sadducees*, was the same? because, in all the nineteen, there is none other will apply to the *Sadducees*; whereas this very properly will, and contains nothing but what might be expected.

* Lightf. Hor. Heb. &c. v. 2. p. 158.

† Prid. Connect. &c. v. 1. p. 375.

from a *Pharisee*, as readily against the *Sadducees* as against the *Christians*. Nor can it be any objection to this conjecture, that this prayer is the twelfth in the present order; because, though the original eighteen were reduced into order, according to their course, by *Siméon Pekoli* *, before *Rabban Gamaliel*, this seems to have been afterwards altered: for we are expressly told, that, under *Rabban Gamaliel* †, and not till then, their daily prayers were digested into that order in which they were transmitted to after ages, and very probably the same in which they stand at present. And thus the celebrated prayer, which at first, either by mistake, or bad design, was represented as levelled against the *Christians*, and has often since, without examination, been referred to as such, turns out to have been originally intended against the *Sadducees*; and is a proof, if you will, of *Gamaliel's*

* Lightf. Hor. Heb. &c. v. 2. p. 158.

† Ibid.

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aversion to that sect; but not so much as a presumption of his dying a Jew and a Pharisee, as some have too rashly from thence concluded.

I have now considered the several opinions that have been offered (so far as I know) for the illustration of *Gamaliel's* conduct, and the principle upon which it was formed; and if I have adventured to place either in a new light, I have been no less severe in the examination of my own opinion than that of others upon this subject; and hope I may now be permitted to conclude, that the conjecture I have offered, with respect to the principle upon which he acted, is the most probable; because, if it is admitted, the whole of his conduct will hang together, and be perfectly consistent with that good sense and prudence for which he was so celebrated; whereas, if it is denied, it does not correspond with either.

It is true, it may be alledged, that some of the above-mentioned facts and circumstances, adduced in proof of *Gamaliel's*

maliet's favourable opinion of Christianity, are liable to objection, and, separately considered, are of little weight. But what if this should be granted? The stress of the conclusion is not laid upon any of them, (or all of them, the one considered independent of the other), but upon the union and combination of the whole,—upon a variety, and at the same time a coincidence of facts, all tending to confirm and support our faith in this opinion; and therefore such as afford, if not the highest, yet a very high degree of probability for the justness of it; and, of consequence, all the evidence (where positive evidence is wanting) which the case can admit of, or we can reasonably desire: for we may safely conclude, (according to the opinion of one who was a very competent judge of the nature of evidence, the several kinds of it, and their respective force), “That, in questions of difficulty, or such as are thought so, where more satisfactory evidence cannot be had, or is not seen, if the result

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“ fult of examination be, that there ap-
 “ pears, upon the whole, any the low-
 “ eft prefumption on one fide, and none
 “ on the other, or a greater prefump-
 “ tion on one fide, though in the low-
 “ eft degree greater, this determines the
 “ question, even in matters of specula-
 “ tion ; and, in matters of practice,
 “ will *,” &c. And, “ in any common
 “ cafe, if numerous events acknow-
 “ ledged are alledged in proof of any
 “ other event difputed, the truth of
 “ the difputed event would be proved,
 “ not only if any one of the acknow-
 “ ledged ones did itfelf clearly imply it,
 “ but, though no one of them fingly
 “ did fo, if the whole of the acknow-
 “ ledged events taken together could
 “ not in reafon be fupposed to have
 “ happened unlefs the difputed one
 “ were true †.”

I need not obferve to the judicious

* Butler’s analogy, &c. Introd.

† Ibid. part 2. chap. 7. *ad fin.*

reader,

reader, that a minute, as well as candid, examination of the several hypotheses which have been offered on this subject, was necessary, not only to determine what regard was respectively due to them, but also to enable him to judge how far that which I have adopted is deserving of the preference I have taken the liberty to give it. He will, before he has proceeded this length, have made the remark himself; and therefore, without offering any other apology for having detained him so long in the discussion of this section, I proceed to

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S E C T. II.

An inquiry into, and illustration of several circumstances, which have a tendency to give weight to Gamaliel's opinion.

TO form a due estimate of the regard that is due to this opinion of *Gamaliel*, several things must be attended to.

If he wanted either abilities or opportunities for forming a proper judgment, or lay under any just suspicion of prejudice, his opinion must lose greatly of its weight, if it should retain any. But,

If, on the other hand, it shall be found, that he was duly qualified to judge of the evidence of Christianity, and its claim to a divine original; and — that, if he had any bias, it was against this religion; these considerations

tions must add greatly to the regard that is due to his opinion.

To enable us to determine in these points, it will be necessary to consider some of the great lines of his character, as drawn by the sacred historian, which exactly corresponds with the account given of him by the historians of the Jewish nation.

It is not, I imagine, without design that Luke is so minute and particular in the description of his character. Had he not intended that we should collect something from it, it might have sufficed to observe here, as he does in other places *, where no stress is laid upon the character of the speaker, that a *certain* person rose, and advised so and so. But here it is observable, he describes him according to the different characters he sustained, — as a member of the Sanhedrim, — a Pharisee, — a doctor of their law, — a favourite of the people; and — that we might not mis-

* Mark xiv. 57. Luke viii. 20. & xi. 37.

take whom he meant, he expressly names him; hereby to insinuate to us, that, viewed in each of these lights, a particular regard was due to his opinion.

If we consider him as a member of the council or Sanhedrim, before which the apostles stood trial, we must allow, that he had the best opportunities of being acquainted with the merits of the cause, from the pleadings on both sides, and the opinions of his colleagues. And, upon this supposition, what less does his opinion intimate, (though not in express words), than, as I hinted before, that he had yet seen no reason to conclude the apostles a set of impostors? else, as one of the guardians of the religion and liberty of his country, he must have acted another part than he did.

Will it not also add to the weight of his opinion, that he belonged to the sect of the Pharisees, and, of the many on the bench, was the only one we are

Q 2 informed

informed of, who stood up for the apostles?

It is not necessary for our argument, to trouble the reader with a minute detail of the principles of this sect*. It is sufficient to observe, that, from the history we have of them, they, either from principle, or an affectation of popularity, encouraged the people in the hopes of a Messiah, under the character of a temporal prince; and, of consequence, were the most violent opposers of our Lord's claim to the title and honours of the true Messiah. Another part of their character is, that they were most zealous sticklers for those rites and ceremonies which added so much to the pomp of their religion; so zealous, that, not satisfied with those which were of divine institution, and of ancient tradition, they superadded many of their own invention. Hence, it is well known, they considered and represented Jesus as an enemy to religion in gene-

* Vid. Prideaux's Connect. &c. vol. 2. p. 340.

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ral, because he hinted the approach of that time, when the manner in which they and their forefathers worshipped, would give place to another more pure, simple, and spiritual; and that the *one* was only intended to prepare the world for the reception of the *other*.

If, to all this, we add the uncommon, but not more than deserved, severity of the reproofs our Lord gave them for their hypocrisy, and the pain he was at to expose their deceit to people, who were but too ready caught with appearances, I submit the impartial world, if the appeal of one of this tribe on the side of Christianity, where it was so little to be expected, does not deserve attention add considerable weight to his opinion concerning it? especially if there be reason to suspect, that it has proceeded from an imperfect view of the subject, or — the want of proper abilities for judging of it, or — from an excessive credulity, which might lay him open to be imposed on by the confident claim
made

made by Jesus Christ himself to the character of Messiah, and the accounts given of him by his disciples.

The sacred historian, as if aware of the force of objections urged from any of these considerations, very properly obviates them, by telling us, that the person who gave this opinion, so favourable for Christianity, was not only a member of the Sanhedrim, and a Pharisee, — but also one of the most celebrated doctors of the Jewish law; and fore one who could fall under no suspicion on any of the above ac-

support of this observation, several all very properly to be considered as, — the inducements he had in making an inquiry into the truth of Christianity, — the opportunities he had of being acquainted with the evidences offered for it, — his abilities for canvassing them, and — the temper with which he seems to have done it.

His office, and the circumstances of time in which he lived, would naturally incline,

incline, if they did not oblige him to inquire into the character of the Messiah, and so enable him the better to judge of the pretensions that should at any time be made to it.

About this juncture, it is well known, there was an almost universal expectation * of the appearance of an extraordinary prince in the world; and in Judea, in particular, there were the greatest hopes, from the writings of their prophets, of the coming of the Messiah †; and therefore, is it not reasonable to think, that every one of tolerable learning in the nation, would examine

* *Tacit. histor. lib. 5.* Pluribus persuasio inerat, antiquis sacerdotum literis contineri, eo ipso tempore fore, ut valesceret oriens, profectique Judea rerum potirentur; quæ ambages Vespasium et Titum prædixerant. Sed vulgus, more humanæ cupidinis, sibi tantam factorum magnitudinem interpretati, ne adversis quidem ad vera mutabantur.

Sueton. histor. in Vespas. cap. 4. Percrebuerat orienti toto vetus et constans opinio, esse in fatis, ut, eo tempore, Judæa profecti rerum potirentur. Id, de imperatore Romano, quantum eventu postea patuit, prædictum, Judæi ad se trahentes, rebellarent.

† Mark xi. 9. 10.; Luke vii. 20.; Acts i. 6.

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the prophetic writings, which were descriptive of the long-looked-for Messiah, especially considering the great hopes they entertained from him? Another thing that would naturally excite a spirit of inquiry at this time, was, that many, taking the advantage of the general expectation the Jews had of the coming of the Messiah, had, from political and interested views, taken upon themselves this character. Yea, these pretensions, besides promoting an examination of the ancient prophecies concerning the Messiah, would produce another good effect,—would make mankind more cautious in admitting any claims that might be afterwards made to this illustrious character. Thus, a variety of circumstances conspired to rouse the attention of the Jews in general to the character and coming of their Messiah, before our Lord's actual appearance in the world; and there was not wanting a concurrence of many wonderful events to keep it up, during
his

his life, and even after his death and resurrection.

To enumerate some of them : Jesus appeared in a character and circumstances quite the reverse of what the Jews expected their Messiah would have chosen ; and for this reason the thoughtless and prejudiced among them, all at once rejected him. But it is far from being improbable, but these very considerations might have induced *Gamaliel*, who could not be ignorant of the eminent talents and abilities he was possessed of, to attend to his claim, by leading him to conclude, that had he been an impostor, he would never, with such extraordinary parts, have chosen an appearance so disagreeable to the expectations of the Jews, and therefore so apt to raise opposition to himself, when a chiming in with their notions would have so easily prevented it, and bid so fair for success to his designs.

The Jews appealed to the predictions concerning the Messiah, in support of *their* conduct. Jesus as readily appeals

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to them, in support of *his*. *They* figured out to themselves a Messiah, under the character of a mighty temporal prince, and formed such an idea of him as greatly flattered their national pride. *He* tells them, that this was their error; and endeavours to correct their notions concerning the Messiah, by shewing them, that they mistook the meaning of those prophecies from which they had formed them; and undertakes to make it appear, from those very places they had pitched on as prophetic of the Messiah, that there was the most perfect harmony betwixt the character therein given of him and his; and that any difference they imagined there was betwixt their characters was only in appearance, and had no foundation but in the unfair glosses and comments they put upon them. Such a ready appeal to their own writings, and the very places they themselves rested on, was putting the controversy upon such a footing, that they could have nothing to object to it.

And

And therefore, as there was a fairness, and boldness too, in this manner of conduct, that was not to be expected from an impostor, nothing could be more natural than to attend to what he had to offer in support of his claim; especially as he often charged their opposition to him upon their *ignorance* of their own scriptures, and their *prejudices* arising from thence; and never failed, when an opportunity offered, to expose both.

But, besides these general reasons, which one would think could scarce fail to excite a spirit of inquiry among the people at this juncture, there were others which might be supposed to operate, particularly upon *Gamaliel*, arising from his station and office.

He was a doctor of the Jewish law, one of those who had colleges for the education of youth; and as such, it might be expected, should be well versed in the system of their theology. His school had acquired the highest reputa-

tion, and was greatly resorted to. And therefore, as the controversy concerning the Messiah was the reigning controversy at that time, and warmly agitated, he could scarce avoid an inquiry into it, was it only to qualify him for those public prelections he must necessarily have upon it, and to save himself from the affront of being exposed by any thing he might advance upon the subject.

To qualify him the better for the duties of this public and important station, as he would find it necessary to look into the ancient prophecies concerning the Messiah, so he would naturally apply to every help he could find for attaining the true and proper meaning of them; especially as he must have known, that the ordinary meaning put upon many of them was controverted by our Lord and his apostles, and doubted of by many of the people. And therefore, if we will but allow, (what is far from being improbable), that *Gamaliel* might himself

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himself have heard *, or been informed by others of, the reasoning of our Lord and his apostles upon the subject of his divine mission, and the evidences of it from the prophets, it is not unreasonable to think, that he might have from thence received great advantages for the right understanding of them, and been brought to see, that the character of Jesus, taken from the life, and that given of the Messiah by the prophets, did perfectly harmonise; or, in other words, that the prophecies concerning the one had an exact accomplishment in the other.

Thus it appears, that many considerations, (and very probably many more than have been taken notice of), some of a general, others of a more private nature, concurred to engage the inquiries of *Gamaliel* into the subject of

* It appears from Luke v. 17. that there were doctors of the law, assembled out of every town of Galilee, and Judea, and Jerusalem, to hear the teaching of Christ.

the Messiah's character, and our Lord's title to it, both before his appearance in the world, and during his stay in it, and — that he had some special advantages for properly conducting them. And, considering the noise which his death made, — the awful and alarming miracles that attended it, — the still as astonishing miracle of his resurrection, which soon succeeded it, and — the growing credit which the report of it gained, is it not natural to think, these things would set him upon a serious review of the whole of this affair, and particularly upon a critical examination of the resurrection, which had been so plainly foretold by our Lord himself, and was now so boldly asserted, and so confidently appealed to, by his apostles, in confirmation of his title to the character and dignity of the Messiah? This was an event so extraordinary in itself, attended with so many extraordinary circumstances, and at the same time supported with such strong evidence, that it could scarce fail to rouse the attention

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tion of all who dwelt in Jerufalem,
 and particularly the members of the
 Sanhedrim, who were indeed, on many
 accounts, more deeply interested in the
 iffue of it, than almost any others.
 And accordingly it feems to have had
 no fmall influence upon *Gamaliel* in de-
 termining his opinion of Chriftianity.
 What makes this the more probable is,
 that this, notwithstanding his advance
 in life, is the firft time we find him ap-
 pearing on the fide of Chriftianity ;
 which, by the by, is a circumftance
 that not only faves him from the im-
 putation of rafhnefs and precipitance,
 but adds greatly, in another refpect,
 to the regard due to his opinion. Did
 we find one forward in giving his opi-
 nion upon an intricate fubject, and be-
 fore he had the whole of it in his view,
 we might very readily fufpect the juft-
 nefs of it, and be apt to think, that he
 had fallen into fome error, for want of
 a mature confideration of it. But this
 does by no means appear to have been
Gamaliel's cafe. The evidence of our
 Lord's

Lord's title to the character of the Messiah was now complete and full before him. He had by this time sufficient opportunities for canvassing it, and all the objections against it; and it is observable, that then (and never before) he, with all the openness that was consistent with his circumstances, and such as scarce leave any ground to doubt of his sentiments concerning it, stands up for those who maintained and taught it.

And as his opinion upon the subject of our Lord's title to the character of Messiah, seems to have been formed upon a full and mature, so also upon a candid examination of it, or a cool and dispassionate inquiry into the nature and evidences of it. But,

“ Whence, may it be asked, does this “ appear ? ” The very opinion itself affords a strong presumption of that candor which we ascribe to him; because, upon any other supposition, it is not probable he could have entertained it: for it stands in direct opposition,

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not only to the opinion of the sect of the Pharisees, to which he had joined himself, but also to that of the rest of the country, and—to that pride for which both were so remarkable.

The Jews, almost all with one consent, hoped for the redemption of Israel by a Messiah, who, they flattered themselves, was to appear in all the state of a mighty prince, and triumphant conqueror; and in this character to increase the glory, and enlarge the boundaries of their country, by making their neighbours tributary to them; and must not *Gamaliel* have divested himself of these prejudices before he could exchange the hopes of *such* a Messiah, for another destitute of that external grandeur; especially as several places of the inspired writings, according to the literal interpretation of them, seemed to countenance such hopes; and the general expectation of the country tended to confirm them? Who does not know the force of the prejudices of education, and how difficult it is to change those

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opinions

opinions one has early imbibed, and which have, as it were, grown *sacred* by the authority of a party, and the fashion of the times, for others less flattering and popular? And therefore is it not presumable, that this change of sentiments in *Gamaliel*, especially at a time of life when most men are firmly settled in them, must have proceeded from a candid examination of his early-received principles? Whence else could it have proceeded? Not from an ambition of hereby advancing his character, or power, or interest. These, I acknowledge, are motives that generally have a very powerful sway, where there is room for them to act. But here, I humbly imagine, there could be none; yea, had any of these been the principle that influenced him, he took the most improbable course in the world to success.

He was already as high in the good graces of the people, as he could well expect to be. And, by forsaking the grandees, what could he look for, but
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to have that character which he had been all his life long acquiring, torn to pieces, and himself branded with the opprobrious names of *enthusiast* and *sectary*? And surely he could have as little hoped for any additional power or riches, by joining himself to a handful of people, who themselves had neither, but were despised and persecuted wherever they went.—But to proceed in our observations upon those strictures, with which the sacred historian is pleased to favour us in the delineation of *Gama-liel's* character :

There is another thing he takes notice of with respect to him; and that is, his *reputation* among his countrymen. Nor does this seem to have dropt from his pen by accident, or without design. He mentions his name, to prevent all ambiguity or mistake about the person he spoke of; and takes notice of the general esteem in which he was had, to give us a hint of the distinguished abilities by which he had acquired it.

The words, *τίμιος ἐν παντὶ τῷ λαῷ*, intimate to us, that he was *respected among all ranks of people*, and not a favourite of the croud or populace only; yea, so popular, and in such high reputation was he among the Jews, that he was dignified with the title of *Rabban*, which, of all the titles of respect bestowed upon their learned doctors, was the highest *, and accounted such a mark of the public esteem, that they were very sparing of conferring it; so sparing, that, however ambitious they might be of it, there were only *six* † more that ever attained the honour of it. But,

Though the high regard or veneration which the Jews had for him, was a good reason why they should pay a particular attention to any advice or opinion of his, and why, perhaps, others should at least give it a fair hearing; yet what should weigh most with us is, not the high encomiums they are pleased to

* Lightf. Hor. Heb. &c. v. 2. p. 232.

† Lightf. Comment. in act. v. 34.

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bestow upon him, but the evidence of his title to them, could any be adduced. This I humbly propose to lay before the reader in the following section.

S E C T. III.

An additional confirmation of the regard due to Gamaliel's opinion and advice, from a particular consideration of the argument with which he enforced it.

THE argument with which *Gamaliel* enforces his advice to the Sanhedrim in this important trial of the apostles, is founded upon some late occurrences in their own country, the history of which they were well enough acquainted with. His account of them runs thus, ver. 36. 37. “ Before these
“ days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be some body, to whom a great
“ number

" number of men, about four hundred,
 " joined themselves : who was slain,
 " and all, as many as obeyed him, were
 " scattered, and brought to nought.
 " After this man rose up Judas of Ga-
 " lilee, in the days of the taxing, and
 " drew away much people after him :
 " he also perished, and all, even as
 " many as obeyed him, were dispersed."
 His advice and reasoning upon it fol-
 low, ver. 38. 39. " Refrain from these
 " men, and let them alone : for if this
 " counsel, or this work, be of men, it
 " will come to nought; but if it be of
 " God, ye cannot overthrow it."

Some, who read the sacred history
 with no other than a captious view, (and
 I am afraid there are too many such),
 boast loudly of their having discovered
 a palpable mistake in it here; and be-
 cause Josephus * makes mention of one
Theudas, who put himself at the head
 of an insurrection in the reign of *Claudi-*
us, and while *Cuspius Fadus* was pro-

* Antiq. lib. 20. cap. 2. ad fin.

curator of Judea, i. e. at least several years after this meeting of the Sanhedrim; therefore rashly conclude, that *Luke* must have been mistaken, and have fallen into a gross anachronism, in placing him before *Judas of Galilee*, who made his appearance in the time of *Augustus*, — in the days of the taxing under him.

This objection, if it has any meaning in it, must be intended to discredit the sacred history, by representing it as a gross inconsistency, to make *Gamaliel* introduce into his speech, and as an illustration of his argument, an historical fact, which, according to the objection, did not happen till several years after.

Cavils, such as this, in place of shewing critical acumen, betray a disposition void of candour, but fond of chicane. For, we need only suppose, that there might be another *Theudas* engaged in an insurrection in the reign of *Augustus*, (and, considering that these were times of great confusion, and that this name
was

was very common among the Jews *, it is no improbable), and then the boasted inconsistency betwixt *Luke* and *Josephus* vanishes at once, and is to be charged, not upon any inaccuracy in *Luke*, or any clash betwixt him and *Josephus*; but upon the prejudice or inattention of the readers, who, from the identity of the names, have too rashly concluded an identity of persons. Besides,

If it should be granted, that there was only *one Theudas* engaged in rebellion against the Roman state, and that *Luke* says, he was *before Judas of Galilee*; but *Josephus*, that he was *after* him, pray what good reason can be assigned, why the latter might not be in the mistake, and not the former? especially as it is well known, that he was a writer far from being accurate in other respects; and, in his account of this matter, might more probably be mistaken

* Lardner's Credib. of the gosp. hist. vol. 2. chap. 7.

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than the other, having wrote his history at a period a little more distant from that in which the event happened, as is generally allowed*.

Having thus cleared the way, by removing an objection which some think might have lien against this passage of history with which we are at present concerned, I come now to the principal design of the section.

In the preceding section, I have shewn what force is derived to *Gamaliel's* advice, from the consideration of the several characters he sustained. But all this will not perhaps by some be deemed sufficient to intitle his opinion to that stress we would lay upon it. Tho' his character, so far as we are acquaint-

* It is probable, that Luke wrote his history about A. D. 63, (See p. 12.); whereas Josephus could not write his so soon. He informs us himself, that he was not born till the first of *Caius*, who was surnamed *Caligula*, i. e. A. D. 37, (see the account of his own life written by himself), and did not write his history till the 56th year of his age, i. e. A. D. 93; (see Antiq. &c. b. 20. ch. 9.); or about thirty years after Luke wrote his.

ed with it from history, was that of a man of solid judgement and extensive learning, yet still there may remain with some a suspicion of his title to it, especially if they are not disposed to fall in with his sentiments.

The partiality of historians has often been complained of; and to this cause, more than his own merit, some may ascribe the shining character that is given of him. But, not to insist on the correspondence betwixt Jewish and Christian writers, foreigners, and those of his own country, (so far as I know), in the character they give of him, because we are under no necessity of pleading it in the present case, — allow me to observe, that the opinion we are to form of him does not rest solely on the sentiments or the tradition of others concerning him. We are ourselves, in some measure, constituted judges of his abilities, and may determine in this point from the part he acted in the council during this solemn and important trial.

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To enable the reader to form a mature judgement in this matter, or to give an equitable decision upon the propriety of the advice which *Gamaliel* offered upon this occasion, and the justness of his reasoning in support of it, it will be necessary to remind him, that what he aimed at, by this appearance for the apostles, was to procure their release, and thereby serve the cause which they supported.

When the situation in which he was then placed is considered, the part he had to act will appear to have been a very difficult one. The greatest address was necessary to carry him through it with success. The Sanhedrim were for proceeding immediately to extremities against the apostles. His business was, if possible, to soften the judges, and divert them from their proposed severity. Well, what course does he pursue for this purpose? Does he, all at once, tell them, that the cause which the apostles supported was the cause of God, and therefore that they would do well

to desist from persecuting them? No. This was what could not be expected in his circumstances, let his opinion of Christianity have been ever so favourable. This could have had no good effect at that time; yea, it might have had a very bad one. It would probably have provoked the Sanhedrim still more, and so been equally unpolitical for himself and the apostles. He goes another way to work, and endeavours to gain his point by the most gentle address,—by not only studiously avoiding whatever had a tendency to rankle the other judges, but as carefully endeavouring, by every method in his power, to soothe and keep them in temper, and so procure a patient and favourable hearing to any thing he might see proper to advance during the dependence of the cause before them.

The Sanhedrim all along gave out, that they considered Christianity as an imposture obtruded upon the world; and therefore that the best way to suppress it, was to destroy the supporters,

as they had already done the author of it. *Gamaliel* labours to divert them from this measure, not merely by the authority of his opinion, or any regard they might be pleased to show to it, but, in a manner more respectful to them,—by endeavouring to convince them, that there was no occasion for it.

His reasoning is to this purpose:—

“ Suspend, ye men of Israel, the execution of the measures ye have now proposed. Circumstances are such as plead for a delay, and prudence requires it should be granted. If *this* cause is only of human contrivance, (as you alledge), no violence is necessary,—such measures as you propose are needless. It will soon fall under its own weight. But, on the other hand, if it is the cause of God, (as the prisoners give out), all opposition on your part will be to no purpose. God will support it; and, if he does, you cannot destroy it.”

The evident design of this reasoning was,—to remove the uneasiness the
Sanhedrim

Sanhedrim seem to have been under from the dreaded success of Christianity, by shewing, that, if it was an imposture, there was no ground for it;—to prevent all violent measures against it, by leading them to consider, that if it was of God, they would (to say the least) be all in vain; and—thus, upon either supposition, to stop the intended severity to the apostles, and procure their liberty.

The argument made use of for these purposes, depends upon two propositions: the first, that this work, (i. e. Christianity), if it be of men, will come to nought; the other, That if it be of God, it cannot be destroyed. The latter is so obvious, that so much as to have offered a proof of it, would have been to trifle with them; and therefore he does not attempt it. But the first, because not so evident, he illustrates by a reference to, and reasoning upon, two very recent occurrences in their own country, viz. the unhappy fates of *Theudas* and *Judas of Galilee*. It is not necessary, because not material to

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our present purpose, to trouble the reader with a particular account of the grounds of the insurrections set on foot by them *. It may suffice at present to observe, that the common opinion is, that these, taking the advantage of the general expectation that prevailed at this time among the Jews, of the coming of the Messiah to extricate them from their subjection to the Romans, had, each of them successively, in order to gain credit to their design, and strength to their party, boasted themselves to be *some body*, i. e. assumed the character of extraordinary prophets, and very probably given some distant hints of their title to the dignity of the Messiah.

To these, it is thought, our Saviour

* Of the insurrection headed by *Judas*, see a particular account, *Joseph. Antiq. book 18. chap. 1.* And if the *Theudas* spoken of by *Luke*, was the same with the *Theudas* of *Josephus*, (though he makes the time of his appearance to be in the reign of *Claudius*,) see an account of his insurrection, *Joseph. Antiq. book 20. chap. 2.*

alludes,

alludes, when he says *, that *they who came before him were but thieves and robbers*, i. e. mere pretenders to the character they usurped; and it is probable, *Gamaliel* considered them in the same light, else he could never have adduced the issue of these insurrections, and the bad success of those who were at the head of them, as an illustration of his argument, or a presumption, that Christianity, if an imposture, would share a similar fate.

“ But, admitting his opinion of *Theudas* and *Judas* to have been, that they
 “ were impostors,” it may be asked,
 “ upon what principle can he, from
 “ the bad success of their enterprises,
 “ infer the speedy destruction of Christianity, supposing it an imposture likewise? Might not the Sanhedrim
 “ have replied to such reasoning, That,
 “ from any thing contained in it, they
 “ did not see but the religion taught
 “ by the apostles might still be a cheat,

* John x. 8.

“ and

“ and yet, under their artful manage-
 “ ment, succeed among a credulous
 “ people ; and therefore that the best
 “ way to crush it was to tolerate neither
 “ it or them any longer ?”

It is granted, that the bad success in the instances of *Theudas* and *Judas*, which *Gamaliel* takes notice of, could not, abstractly considered, justify his conclusion with respect to the religion of Jesus, though it were an allowed imposture too. He understood the art of good reasoning too well to fall into such a gross paralogism, as from the one to infer the other ; for, he could not but know, that, though one imposture soon failed, it would by no means follow, but another, of a nature, and appearing in circumstances quite the reverse, might stand out longer.

“ Whence, then, does he draw his
 “ conclusion, or determine so confi-
 “ dently, concerning the issue of Chri-
 “ stianity ?” Not, as I observed already, from the fate of the schemes of *Theudas* and *Judas*, singly considered,

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but

but chiefly from a comparison of the nature and genius of the Christian system with theirs,—from a consideration of the disadvantages Christianity laboured under, in the want of those qualifications which, if an imposture, were not only proper, but necessary, to recommend it to the world, and procure it a favourable reception. And of this *Gamaliel* himself suggests the hint, in the emphasis which he seems to place upon these expressions, *This counsel, This work*.

Here, as often happens in cases where one is too warmly interested to attend to all the punctilios of formality, his reasoning is elliptical, and of the enthymeme kind, but evidently appears to have been formed upon some such principles as those we have taken notice of above, and, if examined, will be found not only to be just in itself, but also pertinent to the purpose for which it was adduced.

It is well known what a sacred veneration the inhabitants of every country have

have for that mode of religion which has been transmitted to them from their ancestors, and of consequence how difficult it must be to introduce any material innovation into it :—how much more difficult to persuade them to lay it aside altogether, and adopt a *new* one in the place of it?

Hence, therefore, every impostor endeavours to make his advantage of the weaknesses, prejudices, and even vices of the people to whom he addresses himself. With this view, he accommodates his *new* religion to these, and uses all the arts of insinuation, courtesy, and complaisance, he is master of, to gain over the leading men to his interest, well knowing the mighty force of their authority, as well as the attractive influence of their example. But was this the course our Lord took? No; quite the reverse. So far from falling in with the prejudices of the people, his religion runs in direct opposition to them, and contains many doctrines and precepts altogether unsuited to their taste.

In place of flattering those in power and authority, and conniving at their vices, he often singles them out as the objects of his sharpest reproofs. In place of assuming that outward pomp in which they expected the Messiah, he all along shewed a generous contempt of it, modestly refused the royal purple when it was in his offer, and plainly told them, that his kingdom was not of this world.

Such being the genius and texture of that religion which Jesus taught, so disgusting to the passions and prejudices of mankind; — such the plan he pursued, so unprecedented, and so unpromising of success, *Gamaliel* might safely venture to affirm, by an argument *a fortiori*, that if *Theudas* and *Judas*, who flattered the prejudices, and fell in with the popular opinion of the times, had such an unhappy fate, they had no reason to expect better success, whose scheme of religion was opposite to both; — that from such a religion, taught by a few poor illiterate men, without the refinements

refinements of learning, or the charms of eloquence, to recommend themselves or it, nothing was to be feared;—that therefore it might be safely let alone;—yea, that, if an imposture, under all these disadvantages, it would neither spread far, nor stand long, but must be confined within a very narrow circle, and soon dwindle away, and die of itself.

Having thus considered the advice offered by *Gamaliel* on this important occasion, and the reasoning with which he enforced it, it is now humbly submitted, if the one does not appear highly prudent and pertinent, the other logical and conclusive, and both—such as discover a great degree of sagacity and penetration, a considerable acquaintance with the genius of Christianity, and the most judicious reflections upon human nature;—such as were admirably calculated to gain time, to bring his colleagues to temper, and imperceptibly to lead them (if any thing could do it) into his measures,—if possible, into
more

more favourable sentiments of Christianity, or, if this was too much to hope for, into a more gentle and humane treatment of its first advocates, than, in the tumult of their passions, they once seemed resolved on. In a word, does not his conduct, through the whole of this affair, appear to have been managed with such strength of judgement, with such command of temper, and such dexterity of address, as would have been admired in any other but a friend to Christianity, and, except in this only case, owned a very proper subject for the highest panegyric, even by those who now pretend to think otherwise of it?

Thus I have, with the greatest candour, offered what has occurred to me for the illustration of this remarkable passage of sacred history. It is the business of the reader to judge of the importance of the preceding observations, and of the justness of their application in those which follow in the conclusion; and therefore, that he may be the bet-

ter

ter enabled to give a proper decision on this subject, I shall, to save him the trouble of a tedious review of it, collect the hints which lie scattered through this essay into as narrow a compass as possible, and present them to him at one view.

The substance of what has been observed in the preceding pages is this: That though the apostles openly asserted, that Jesus was the Messiah, and the Son of God; and, in confirmation of this, appealed to the many miracles he had himself wrought before his death, and enabled them to work after it; and particularly to his resurrection from the dead, agreeable to his own prediction concerning it; yet the Sanhedrim never attempted to disprove any of those miracles, notwithstanding they were called upon to do it, from a regard to their own honour, and the interest of the nation, and were possessed of the means necessary for this purpose, had it been practicable: — That, in place of attempting to refute the account which
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the apostles gave of their master's resurrection, all they did was, to trump up a false story concerning it; to bribe the soldiers to homologate and spread it; to injoin the apostles silence upon this subject; and, when they found their orders were disregarded, to add threats of their highest displeasure in case of future disobedience:—That though, in the first transports of their rage, they seem to have resolved on the death of the apostles, at this famous trial which they underwent; yet, upon the reasoning of *Gamaliel*, like men whose consciences had been awakened thereby, they alter the measures they first proposed, and pursue more mild ones:—That the advice given by *Gamaliel*, recommending lenity to the apostles, did not proceed from considerations of mere prudence, or an attachment to a party, or a principle of moderation, or an opinion that the apostles had, like some who had gone before them, engaged in the cause of liberty against the Romans, or from any uncertainty with respect to the merits

rits of Christianity, but from the favourable opinion he had of it as the cause of God; and that the modest reserve with which he spoke will appear to be of no force against this conjecture, if the circumstances in which he was then placed, the temper and character of the judges, the hazard of his own and the apostles situation, several passages of the sacred history, both before and after this trial, and the opinion of antiquity concerning him, are but fairly considered:—That *Gamaliel's* favourable opinion of Christianity receives great weight from the several characters he sustained, as a member of the Sanhedrim, a Pharisee, a great favourite of the people, a doctor of the law, and a teacher in one of their most celebrated colleges:—That a variety of the strongest considerations, some of a general, others of a more private nature, concurred to engage him in a critical examination of the resurrection and Messiahship of our Lord; and that there is no reason to suspect, that his

X judgement

judgement upon this subject proceeded upon an imperfect view of it, or any criminal bias from the flattering prospects of ambition and interest :— Yea, that he appears to have been a man of a solid and penetrating judgement, fit for carrying on the inquiry we suppose him to have made; and that our opinion with regard to this part of his character does not rest merely upon the account given of him by the Jews, or the high veneration in which he was had among them, but, along with this, upon the specimen we have of his conduct and reasoning before the Sanhedrim, and the prudence, delicacy, and address, with which he managed both.

In the proof and illustration of the several particulars above mentioned, I have far exceeded the bounds I first proposed to myself; but I shall not think my labour lost, nor doubt of the reader's pardon, if they shall be found sufficient to support the deductions from them, contained in the following

C O N -

C O N C L U S I O N.

MANKIND, from a curiosity natural to them, are strongly prompted to examine the history, and scan the actions, of those who have gone before them, and who, from their birth, their stations in life, or the scenes through which they have passed, have become remarkable and distinguished. The employment is not only a source of the most agreeable entertainment, but also of the most useful improvement. Considered in this point of view, the passage of history we have endeavoured to illustrate, affords many instructive hints; some of which we beg leave to take notice of, and a little to elucidate.

In the first place, it exhibits an argument in favour of Christianity, and one far from being inconsiderable, from the

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conduct

conduct of some of its bitterest enemies.

From the suspicion which some are apt to entertain of the testimony of a friend, the enemies of Christianity have taken the hint, and endeavoured to discredit the testimony given to it by the apostles, by sily insinuating, that they were to be considered in no other light than as partisans of its founder, engaged, from some political view, in a design of obtruding upon the world their own fictions for divine revelations, and therefore were undeserving of any regard. Insinuations thus artfully thrown out, take with many; and especially with such as are unwilling to submit to the restraints of this religion, or to bestow that time and application that would be necessary to canvass and judge of the evidence offered to support it.

There can be no valid objection against the evidence of a friend to Christianity, merely as such. There is nothing in this religion to hinder the votaries

taries of it from being honest; yea, the whole strain of it tends to make them such; and therefore, if there appears no bias in their evidence, it would be most unreasonable to reject it. Upon this principle, the advantage accruing to Christianity from the testimony of its first advocates, has been illustrated with great force and beauty. But here we adduce, not the testimony of its friends, but of its enemies, in hopes that those who pretend to suspect the integrity of the one may be disposed to consider, and from thence to admit, the evidence of the other. Let us then bring from the bench the members of the Sanhedrim, (the very judges before whom the cause of Christianity and the conduct of the apostles were early tried), and examine the whole of their procedure in this affair at the bar of impartial reason; and shall we not find them become, though against their inclination, evidences for the truth of that religion which they endeavoured, with all their might, to suppress? Does not their
conduct

conduct betray, notwithstanding all the pains they were at to conceal it, a conviction of the truth of the resurrection of that very Jesus whom they had crucified, and so, by the most natural consequence, afford an argument for the truth of his religion, which rests upon this as its basis and foundation, and must either stand or fall with it? For from what else could this conviction proceed, but from the strength of evidence too clear to be resisted? Could they possibly have avoided it, they gave the most undeniable proof, that they had no inclination to believe it. But should it be alledged, that their conduct does not speak a *conviction*, but a *suspicion*, that the resurrection might be real, the case will not be greatly altered; yea, the conclusion in favour of Christianity will still be much the same.

It is certain they had every necessary advantage for coming at the knowledge of the fact as it really stood. They lived upon the spot,—in that very place which was the scene of our Lord's acknowledged

knowledged death, and alledged resurrection,—they had a great hand in bringing about the one, and were therefore greatly concerned to inquire into the truth of the other,—they had the means of properly conducting the inquiry, and the power of bringing it to an issue; and therefore, if they entertained but so much as a *suspicion* that the resurrection of Jesus was real, does it not show, that nothing hindered this from issuing in a thorough *conviction*, but the want of candour and patience on their part in pursuing the inquiry, especially as the apostles were still willing to give them all the evidence that was necessary for their satisfaction? And now let me ask, Must not the evidence for the resurrection of our Lord, which arises from the conviction of the members of the Sanhedrim, notwithstanding all the pains they were at to conceal it, and in spite of all the violence they offered to their own minds in endeavouring to suppress it, appear
 justly

justly most convincing to every unprejudiced person? But this is not all:

Not only does the court in general betray the strongest signs of their conviction of our Lord's resurrection, but here is a particular member,—one of the first eminence for rank, character, and esteem, among his countrymen, who stands up as an advocate for his religion, and whose defence of it, if not so full as could be wished, was yet as full as prudence, and the circumstances in which he was placed, would allow; one whose appearance for it deserves the more regard, because he seems to have been a man, not only of an excellent understanding, but also of a cool temper, and great candour, and to have examined it with all the *impartiality* of the judge, and *exactness* of the critic. And though it will not follow, that we must believe merely upon his credit, without knowing the evidences upon which his faith rested;—though it must be allowed, that whatever reasons *Gamaliel* had for *his* faith, they can have

no

no influence upon *ours*, unless we are also made acquainted with them; and that, if these grounds of his faith remain, *they*, and not his *convictions*, are the proper foundation of our faith likewise: yet, at the same time, must it not be owned, that,—“ When a person of abilities, “ one especially who is remarkable for “ just reasoning, has examined an opinion carefully, and after examination “ holds it, this gives a presumption, “ that he found it fully proved? Do “ we not immediately conclude, that if “ there had been any defect in the evidence, his acuteness would have probably enabled him to discover it? “ This alone is far from being a full “ proof of the truth of an opinion; “ but does it not afford a real, frequently a strong probability for its “ truth, and, when joined to other evidences, always make some addition “ to their force? Suppose a man to “ have fairly examined the evidences of “ Christianity, according to the best of “ his abilities, and in consequence of

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“ that

“ that examination to believe it; when
 “ he finds that great numbers of per-
 “ sons, many of them men of the high-
 “ est abilities, have likewise believed it,
 “ and given testimony to it, will not
 “ this produce, at least, greater confi-
 “ dence in his own judgement, and
 “ make him less suspicious that he may
 “ possibly be mistaken, and by these
 “ means contribute to strengthen his
 “ faith * ?” — Let us then attend to
Gamaliel's character, the circumstances
 in which he was placed, the favourable
 opportunities, and the strong induce-
 ments, he had for a critical examination
 of Christianity; and what less can his
 appearance for it imply, than that he
 had found no flaw in its evidence? for
 surely, had the proof of the resurrection
 of Jesus lain under any just suspicion,
 — had any part of the character given
 of the Messiah by the prophets appear-
 ed to have been wanting in that of Je-
 sus, there could have been no ground

* Dr Gerard's Dissert. p. 409.

for hesitation. He would, all at once, from his regard to the prophetic writings, have pronounced him a false Messiah, however specious in other respects his pretensions might be to this character. Yea, *Gamaliel's* faith in the religion of Jesus is not only a proof that he found no flaw in the evidence for it, but also that it must have appeared to him very strong and satisfying, when, notwithstanding all the care with which it is probable he canvassed it, — notwithstanding all the considerations which could arise from a regard to character, interest, and worldly policy, united to dissuade him from it, he appeared on the side of Christianity at so critical a juncture; — a juncture when his advice (cautious and prudent as it was) might have proved very dangerous to him, had it not been for the decisive authority it carried along with it.

And as *Gamaliel's* faith affords a presumption, that the evidence for Christianity appeared to him strong and conclusive; so his reasoning with the

Sanhedrim suggests an argument, from which may be deduced an additional confirmation of ours. The argument with which he enforced his advice seems originally to have been used by way of lenitive, with a view to soften the measures which the court had proposed against the apostles, by endeavouring to convince them, (as has been observed already), that there was no occasion for such severity. This was almost the only purpose to which it could *then* be applied. Until the experiment was made, no conclusion could be drawn with respect to the merits of Christianity, from the issue of it. It has now undergone the trial, to which the determination of the dispute about its origin was referred; and in its success we are furnished with a criterion by which to judge of it. The trial has been carried on for many centuries, at one time with all the subtilty of argument, at another with all the force of power, and sometimes with both at once; and yet it has not been in the power of its adversaries,

by

by all the assaults they have made upon it, to *overthrow* it: and therefore may we not invert *Gamaliel's* argument, and safely conclude, that it cannot be *of men*, yea (for there is no other alternative) that it must be *of God*?

For illustrating and confirming the justness of this conclusion, allow me to observe, that while Christianity was in its very infancy, the *power* of the *magistrate*,—the *acuteness* of the *philosopher*,—the *intrigue* of the *priests*,—the *eloquence* of the *orator*,—the *smartness* of the *wit*,—the *freaks* of *superstition*,—and the *prejudices* and *vices* of the *people*, all united, and formed a combination, not only to oppose its progress, but to destroy its very being and existence, while in appearance it was only supported by a few men, none of whom, except *Paul*, had any of those accomplishments that were necessary to recommend them, or their religion, to the world; and yet, in spite of this formidable, and almost universal, confederacy against it, it has subsisted, spread, triumphed, flourished.

ed. Now, to what other cause, but the support it received from truth, and the guardianship of Heaven, can we ascribe its so extraordinary success? Without this, must it not, in such circumstances, have soon dwindled away to nothing? *Falsehood* and *imposture* may be so artfully disguised, so dextrously varnished and coloured over, as to have the appearance of *truth*, and for a while it may pass *unsuspected* for it; but a critical examination seldom fails to wash off the paint, and discover the cheat that lies concealed under it. It is truth alone that can bear the strictest scrutiny. The greater the variety of lights in which it is viewed, in place of losing, it gains by it, and in each discovers some new beauty unobserved in the former. Accordingly, to the honour of Christianity, it has often and justly been observed, that the more it was examined, the better it was understood: its divine extraction, and native worth, did in proportion become the more conspicuous. The attempts of its enemies
upon

upon it, like the experiment of the chymist upon suspected, but genuine, metal, have but afforded new evidences of its inherent excellence. Like the ancient people of God in Egypt, it throve under its oppression, — triumphed by the very means used to destroy it, — in spite of the most powerful opposition, soon put an end to the Jewish and Gentile modes of worship, — established itself in Jerusalem, the seat of the former, and in Rome, that of the latter, and — from thence spread itself through the greatest part of the inhabited world.

To this reasoning in favour of Christianity, from its success, I know the success of the Mahometan religion (if it deserves the name) will be objected. But to this I beg leave to reply, that so widely different are the religion of *Jesus* and that of *Mahomet*, in their constitution, and manner of propagation, that success is not more opposite to the supposition of imposture in the first, than it is consistent with it in the other.

Whoever

Whoever will be at the trouble to read the *Coran*, which contains the religion of *Mahomet*, cannot miss to observe with what art it is framed in order to gain profelytes.

It is a motley religion, in which several things from the Pagan, Jewish, and Christian religions, (with the two last of which he became acquainted in his travels through Syria and Palestine), are blended together; and it is observable, that only such things are culled out of each, as the sagacious impostor thought would be most agreeable to the taste of those for whom it was first calculated, and among whom it at first appeared.

With this view, and to gain the more easy reception to it, it is calculated to gratify the passions of its votaries, by giving an unbounded licence and toleration to the indulgence of their favourite lusts, and representing his paradise (which was to be the reward of their service) as a scene of sensual delights.

But

But at the same time, from a consciousness that it contained many things so absurd as must expose it to contempt, if examined with the least freedom, he very wisely forbade all disputes * about the doctrines of it, under the severest penalties, even death itself not excepted; and so they may be said to be imposed upon, rather than credited by, the people who profess to believe them.

This religion crept in with the confusion and ignorance of the times †, and made its first appearance in the interior part of a vast country,—secluded from a free commerce or intercourse with its neighbours, by wide-extended deserts,—among a people sunk into the grossest barbarism, and—in an age clouded with ignorance so great, that, of the people of *Mecca*, the scene of the impostor's first appearance, there was

* Prid. life of Mahom. edit. 6. p. 77.

† Ibid. p. 14. about *A. D.* 608.

only one man who could either read or write *.

Like all other impostures, this religion loves to sculk in darkness, afraid that the light might discover its deformity; and, diffident of its own strength, or rather conscious of its weakness, is ever furrounded with a most formidable guard of penal laws, that by these it might suppress a spirit of rational inquiry, keep the people in a blind and implicit subjection to their designing teachers, and so command that outward respect from its votaries, which it had not excellence enough to procure without it. And therefore, as this impostor has taken the way to introduce and propagate his religion, which, in all human probability, did bid fairest for success, the miracle had been if it had died sooner:—whereas, on the other hand, considering the genius of Christianity,—the enlightened age in which it made its appearance,—the

* Prid. life of Mahom. edit. 6. p. 32.

freedom

freedom of inquiry which it allowed, or rather invited,—the manner of its propagation, and—the opposition which has been made to it, its spread and success must be owing to a cause quite different from that which gave birth to, or has since supported, the religion of Mahomet.

But, to return from this digression, if it may be called one, allow me further to observe, that as *Camaliel's* reasoning tends to confirm the faith, so also to increase the joy and comfort of the Christian, by giving him the agreeable hopes, or rather assurance, of the safe transmission of this religion to ages the most remote and distant, maugre all the attempts of its enemies, not only to check its progress, but totally to destroy it. When its sincere votaries observe the powerful combination formed against it, — the indifference with which it is treated by some, — yea, the contempt poured upon it by others; when to all this they add, that some of its professed friends stand unconcerned

spectators of the whole, while others of them shamefully desert it, and join the growing faction against it, their fears immediately take the alarm, and whisper to their anxious minds a danger of its overthrow. But a faith in its divine original, thus confirmed, may quickly dispel their fears. A local and temporary decline, it may sometimes languish under, from a variety of causes; but a total suppression of it, there is no reason to dread *. Yea, abstracting from the assurance we have of its duration, arising from the immediate support it may expect from God, considered as his cause, our hopes are confirmed by a reflection upon the success of this religion in the past periods of its existence, notwithstanding the severe oppression it has often groaned under. For if, in any case, we can from past events deduce future consequences, we

* See Dr Dick's sermon, preached before the society for propagating Christian knowledge, *anno* 1762.

may,

may, from the success which Christianity has hitherto had, infer its future permanence and stability; and, from its former triumphs, solace ourselves with the pleasing prospect of its increasing influence, and spreading conquests, until at length *all the kingdoms of the earth shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.* In a word, Christianity, like a rock in the midst of a boisterous sea, has, for upwards of 1700 years, been exposed to all the furious assaults of its enemies. These, like so many billows, have dashed upon it, but have never been able to shake it; and so have only served to discover their own weakness, and its strength.

In these respects which I have mentioned above, the conduct of *Gamaliel* becomes of admirable service to the *Christian*; and, if duly attended to, would not be without its advantage to the *sceptic* and *infidel*.

His appearance for Christianity tends to remove the force of an objection
sometimes

sometimes thrown out against it, viz.
 “ That it was only fit to gain credit
 “ with the vulgar and illiterate, but
 “ could not bear the scrutiny of the
 “ learned and intelligent.” To this
 purpose, the Sanhedrim ask, with an
 air of triumph *, *Have any of the rulers
 believed in him ? i. e. Jesus.* And ob-
 jections such as these, trifling and silly
 as they are, have often contributed to
 excite, or at least to strengthen, preju-
 dices in weak minds against it.

It is not denied, that of the first con-
 verts and profelytes to Christianity, the
 greater number was of the lower class
 of people; but so it was, not because
 it could not stand the examination of
 the more knowing, but because the ge-
 nius and spirit of it was more adapted
 to those of a humble cast of mind.
 This religion was not at all calculated
 to favour the *schemes of politicians*, — the
dogmata of philosophers, — the *conceits of*
Rabbi's, — the *flights of orators*, — the in-

* John vii. 50.

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terested views of the ambitious,—the national hopes of the Jews,—nor the theology of the Gentiles. It was not at first preached, nor afterwards published, to the world, *in the enticing words of man's wisdom*, but with the greatest plainness and simplicity imaginable. Hence it was, that to the *Jews*, who could only brook the thoughts of a temporal Messiah, it was a *stumbling-block*, and to the *Gentiles* or *Greeks*, who boasted of their refinements in knowledge and learning, it appeared an instance of the greatest *foolishness*. What wonder, therefore, that few of either of these characters came over to it at first? They stood out against it, and opposed it, not because they found its evidence defective, but because they never looked into it, and could not bring themselves to believe that to be true, which their passions, prejudices, and vices, made them wish to be false. — Besides,

There will appear to be little, if any, weight in this objection, if we consider, that the Divine Providence, which
knows

knows how to make all events subser-
 vient to its designs, seems to have in-
 tended a service to the cause of religion,
 by the very means which its enemies
 thought would have ruined it. Had
 the *great*, — the *noble*, — the *learned*,
 come over at first in great numbers to
 it, those infidels, who at present alledge
 that their conversion would have been a
 presumption in its favour, would not
 have failed long since to have adduced
 this as an objection against it, and to have
 whispered insinuations of its being no
 more than an interested *plot*, laid with
 the deepest policy, and supported by
 those in power and authority :— where-
 as, when not only the first *preachers* of,
 but the first *converts* to, this religion,
 were of a contrary character, its success
 cannot be ascribed to the *charms* of *rhe-*
toric, the *subtilties* of *philosophy*, or the
influence of *worldly power*, but to the
evidence of *truth*, and the *power* of *God*.
 Thus “ God hath chosen the foolish
 “ things of the world, to confound the
 “ wise; and the weak things of the
 “ world,

“ world, to confound the things that
 “ are mighty : and thus the foolishness
 “ of God is wiser than men, and the
 “ weakness of God stronger than
 “ men *.”

But though the gospel does not affect a vain parade in an account of its triumphs over the prejudices of the *great*, and the *learned* ; yet, if these are accounted any proof of its excellence, such trophies of its power are not wanting. Witness the *Roman centurion* †, who stood by the whole suffering scene of our Lord's crucifixion, and, overpowered by conviction, glorified God, crying out, to give vent, as it were, to the honest emotions of his heart, *This was a righteous man ! Truly, this was the Son of God.* Witness also *Cornelius* ‡, — *Dionysius* ||, a member of the venerable court of Areopagus, at Athens, —

* 1 Cor. i. 25. 27.

† Matth. xxvii. 54. Luke xxiii. 47.

‡ Acts x. 2.

|| Acts xvii. 34.

Sergius Paulus *, the Roman deputy or proconsul in Cyprus. “ But these,” it may be said, “ were all converts from “ Heathenism : perhaps they gave themselves but little trouble to examine into the nature of this new religion, or “ the foundation upon which it is supported. Were there any Jews of “ rank and character among the first “ converts to it ? ” Yes. What think you of *Manaen*, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul † ; and of *Paul*, who, if not a Jew by birth, was educated in the religion of the Jews, and was, for a considerable time, a most zealous persecutor of the Christians ‡ ? But do these stand alone ? No. Many of the *priests* likewise believed ||. But have any of the *rulers* believed ? Yes : many : and among these Nicodemus **,

* Acts xiii. 12.

† Ibid. 1.

‡ Ibid. ix. 1. &c.

|| Ibid. vi. 7.

** John iii. 2. and vii 50. 52.

and

and Joseph of Arimathea *. The Sanhedrim asked, if any of their number believed, in a manner as if they were confident that none of them ever would, and as if they admitted, that such an instance (if any such there should ever be) must have a considerable weight in it. And so, no doubt, it ought, when to the consideration of their rank and distinction we add that of their violent prejudices against this religion.

Upon the whole, does not what has been observed above shew, that the evidence for Christianity is not so weak as some of our modern sharp-sighted infidels pretend; and therefore must not all those illiberal invectives they have thrown out against it (the pretended effect of their discovery of its weakness, but the real effect of their own ignorance and prejudice) recoil upon themselves?

There is another useful observation suggested to us from this piece of histo-

* Luke xxiii. 50. 51. John xix. 38.

ry; and it is this, That the sentiments of this learned Rabbi should rouse the inattentive and prejudiced to an impartial examination of the more direct evidences of the truth of this religion;—should make them suspect, that their *infidelity* is not so much the result of the *want of evidence*, as the *want of a due consideration of it*,—that its evidences may have more strength than they are apt to imagine, or disposed to allow them, and—therefore, that they ought not to reject them, until first they have, with a candour equal to his, examined them, and can say they have found them lame and inconclusive, left in the issue they be found to be fighting against God.

Our modern Deists now assume to themselves the name of *freethinkers*, by way of honourable distinction, though it was originally given with another view. But scarce any can have a poorer title to it than they have: For did they but allow themselves to think, and to think with that honest freedom which
alone

alone can deserve the name, in the sense in which they claim it, they would not long remain infidels. The evidence for the truth of Christianity would appear too strong to be resisted. One proof of this, among innumerable others, we have in the success of *Gamaliel's* inquiry, which, while it encourages a similar conduct in others, at the same time shews, that a sincere desire of knowing the truth, and candour in searching for it, is all that is necessary to the attainment of it. For, as the author of the book of Wisdom observes,—

“ Wisdom is glorious, and never fadeth
 “ away : she is easily seen of them that
 “ love her, and found of such as seek
 “ her. She preventeth them that desire
 “ her, in making herself first known
 “ unto them. Whoso seeketh her early,
 “ ly, shall have no great travel ; for he
 “ shall find her sitting at his doors.
 “ To think, therefore, upon her, is the
 “ perfection of wisdom ; and whoso
 “ watcheth for her, shall quickly be
 “ without care. For she goeth about
 “ seeking

“ seeking such as are worthy of her,
 “ sheweth herself favourably unto them
 “ in the ways, and meeteth them in
 “ every thought.” Chap. vi. 12. 13. 14.
 15. 16.

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